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HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

August, 1982 \$1.50

32
More Pages!

The Birds

Daphne Du Maurier
and 6 Exciting New Stories



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"Remember. . . one flick if by land, two if by sea."
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Cover by Ray VarnBuhler

EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

Putting together the new look for AHMM—one we very much hope you will approve—has been both fun and instructive. (We have worn our pencils to nubs solving logic problems, for instance, and we can tell you that the new typeface is Century Schoolbook Roman, with Eastern Souvenir titles.) But one of the nicest parts has been the chance it has given us to involve even more writers, past and present, in the magazine. We are particularly pleased to be able to introduce two new members of our outside staff, Mary Cannon, our book reviewer, and Peter Shaw, film reviewer. Both of them are delightful people, as knowledgeable about what makes good and satisfying entertainment as anyone we are ever likely to know; they are both acute critics, possessed of a sense of humor, an appreciation of the grand moment in the mystery world, and sturdy opinions.

In this issue, Peter Shaw devotes his column to one film. In future ones, he will at times

cover several films more briefly. Mary Cannon's job will always be several-fold: not only does she cover new releases of mystery books, she has also undertaken for us the writing of an author profile in each issue.

Peter Christian is still with us, of course, with a new title for his column. He will continue to focus on moments of particular interest in the past of the mystery on screen, and this time his subject is the films based on Daphne Du Maurier's novels and short stories.

Which leads us to those past writers, mentioned above, and another new feature, the Mystery Classic. Under that heading, we have had in mind bringing you two kinds of fiction: (1) an especially chilling or entertaining—and always well told—story from the files of the top mystery stories ever written, and (2) every so often, those stories on which Hitchcock films were based. The first entry, "The Birds," is eminently both. Not only is it a remarkable story in itself, it is interesting,



From Alfred Hitchcock's film *The Birds*, starring Rod Taylor, Tippi Hedren, Jessica Tandy, and Veronica Cartwright.

*The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive, 11 W. 53rd Street,
New York City; © 1963 Universal Pictures Company, Inc.*

we think, to see the parts Hitchcock adapted directly from it—the children running from the birds, for example, and the birds getting down the chimney—as well as those he preferred to recast. Donald Spoto, author of *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, points out the frequency of bird imagery in Hitchcock films (he cites eleven others in which it was used) and says, “Where *The Birds* differs from earlier Hitchcock films...is in its systematic denial of all rational ex-

planations and simple acceptance of the mystery.”

As such, it seems a fitting beginning for the Mystery Classic. And if every second person in the country seems to have seen the film, many fewer seem to have read Daphne Du Maurier's chilling, and rather different, story. We thought you would like it.

As always, we don't have the space to mention everything inside, though we wish we did, especially this time when there

are a number of new things to talk about, but we do have room for a word about at least two other writers represented in this issue. Barbara Ninde Byfield is likely to be a familiar name, as are her characters Helen Bullock and Simon Bede. Helen and Simon have been solving mysteries for several years now, in novel form, starting with *Solemn High Murder* (Doubleday Crime Club, 1975). That one was written in collaboration with Frank Tedeschi, and it was followed by *Forever Wilt Thou Die, A Harder Thing Than Triumph*, and most recently, *A Parcel of Their Fortunes*. "The Blushing Bride" is her first short story about them.

She has also written a number of mysteries for children as well as *The Eating-in-Bed Cookbook* and *The Book of Weird*. And she is an accomplished illustrator.

Louis Weinstein, author of

"The Long Memory," which is set on the New York waterfront, is a retired New York City dockmaster. The dockmasters, he tells us, are the law enforcement branch of the Department of Marine and Aviation, and during his twenty-seven years on the job, he covered the entire New York waterfront "on foot, by car, by boat," for much of the time as chief troubleshooter. "The Long Memory" is his second mystery story; he has also written about twenty sports stories and a couple of science fiction tales under the name of Jackson Barrow.

But enough from us about what's inside. We do hope you enjoy it all—the article from Vincent James about a particularly eerie mystery from the past, the puzzle, the various artists' work, the letters from other readers, and the Mysterious Photograph, for armchair detectives to solve.

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LETTERS

You want to know what we like about AHMM—I like the stories, mostly really short ones. It's fun to keep the magazine handy and have a story to read while having a quick cup of coffee.

Jennie Rocca-Klosky
Linden, N.J.

We try to have all kinds. But if the writers don't write short short stories . . . ED.

A great deal has already been written about the films of Alfred Hitchcock and not enough about his two television series, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*. I would suggest you include a show-by-show guide to these series in future issues. The guide should include the episode's title and information on the cast, writer, story on which the teleplay was based, director, music composer, and cinematographer. The Hitchcock television shows are simply too good to be allowed to fall into obscurity.

I would also like to see a list of all the stories that have ever appeared in AHMM. It would

be a mystery aficionado's delight.

I hope that in the future AHMM will shed its "new stories" policy and reprint material from a variety of sources. The stories should be good ones that were somehow overlooked by anthologists. In fact, you were reprinting short stories for a while, and I wish you hadn't stopped.

I also hope to see more weird fiction in your pages, like stories with as much horrific impact as Richard Matheson's unforgettable 1957 AHMM classic, "The Children of Noah." Finally, if a script was ever written for *The Short Night*, the project Mr. Hitchcock was working on at the time of his death, why don't you publish it in installments?

Harvey F. Chartrand
Ottawa, Ontario

The script was finished, and its author was David Freeman. We'll see what we can do. . . . In the meantime, for the reprints you asked for, see "The Birds" in this issue and the "Mystery Classic" in every issue from now

on. In the future we also hope to reprint some of the stories on which the TV shows were based; the guide you suggest would be a good idea if we could lay hands on one. ED.

Joyce Porter, with her deliciously humorous stories of the Hon. Con, is among my favorite writers. Ron Butler's Sam Brent/Inspector Ueki stories are always good. Stephen Wasylyk's senior citizens stories—good. Edward D. Hoch—good. I've found a lot of priceless information in the "Crime on Screen" articles. Don't ever drop that feature. One feature I'd love to see some day is a bit of background on individual writers. I imagine Ron Butler has lived in Japan and/or is married to a Japanese lady—right?

Marian Leemhuis
Hart, Mich.

Ron Butler taught at Okayama University of Science in Japan from 1974 until very recently. He is an anthropologist. ED.

I would like to ask why there are so many stories by English authors. Once in a while it is interesting to read them, but you are overdoing it! The terminology is different although

the language may be the same, and the settings and circumstances can be confusing.

Mary I. Dee
North Providence, R.I.

Well, now, there you are. We thought we were rather short on stories by English authors. The easiest way to get familiar with the settings and terminology you mentioned is to spend some time reading all those marvelous English writers, from Agatha Christie to P. D. James, but watch out. Not only do things fall into place pretty fast, but you're likely to get hooked. And then you'll start writing us letters asking why there are so few stories by English authors! For the record, you made us curious so we counted up: in the preceding year, out of AHMM's 130 stories, sixteen were by British writers. ED.

I do have some suggestions for the magazine: (1) going to slick size; (2) enlarging the type face; (3) an "Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Newsletter," with "Crime on Screen" incorporated into it; (4) book reviews and facts about mystery writers and their stories.

It's great to have Jack Ritchie's Cardula back again. It must have been a century since

Cardula last sank his teeth into the pages of AHMM.

Gary Seiler
Kitchener, Ontario

For points two and four, see this issue. For point one, see below.
ED.

The size of the magazine is its greatest attraction. We have more than enough magazines to leave at home on the cocktail table, but AHMM can easily be carried in one's purse, in a briefcase, on the dashboard, etc., and that makes it ideal to take on shopping trips, to dental or doctor appointments, or to a quick lunch by oneself at a restaurant.

Frankly, I like the magazine just as it is, and if any more is added, I probably wouldn't bother with it.

Elsie C. Carter
Ontario, Calif.

Oh, nuts. ED.

Make the covers of AHMM distinctive from EQMM again, and put Hitchcock back on the cover

in the grand tradition, with a mixture of black and white photographs of him and drawings as you did in 1977 and 1978. The caricatures should also be continued occasionally.

Brian Kirkeby
Salt Lake City, Utah

The drawings are different, but Mr. Hitchcock is certainly there. See the front of this issue. ED.

I like *everything* about AHMM. I would like very much to read more stories by Ron Butler about Sam Brent and Noriko, Edward Wellen's stories with their unusual twists, Jack Ritchie's stories, and S. S. Rafferty's stories set in the early nineteenth century.

Debra E. Barrett
Baltimore, Md.

A nice note to end on. Watch for the September issue: you'll find a new Ron Butler story and an S. S. Rafferty story—one in the Chick Kelly series. Those are good, too. We'll have a Rafferty "Hawk" story later in the year.
ED.

Letters should be addressed to The Editor, Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10017.

FICTION

THE BLUSHING BRIDE

by Barbara
Ninde Byfield



Illustration by Lisa Mansolillo

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“**L**ook, Simon, aren’t they touching?” Helen Bullock, on the foredeck of a small Portuguese freighter preparing to sail from Brooklyn, pointed with her tanned chin at the elderly couple puffing up the gangplank, their cheap new suitcases apprehensively tied with rope. A sailor followed with a buckling metal footlocker on a handcart. “I can tell you all about them, I bet.” She squeezed his warm, square hand on the railing eagerly; ships and trips were exciting to them both, and although Helen was no longer all-consumed with her career as a photo journalist and considered herself semi-retired, new faces and curious situations were still the breath of life to her.

“Can you now? Tell away, my love.” The Englishman smiled at her dancing face, lit with hot reflections from the East River. The July sun burned on his balding head, and although his clerical suit, which he had not had time to change before boarding, was the lightest summer weight, he mildly envied the large old man below the cheap straw hat he was wearing.

“Okay. Here I go. Their families came over from Portugal decades ago, and these two grew up in—let’s see, New Bedford? Yes, New Bedford, there are lots of Portuguese there. They lived in the same neighborhood, went to the same school—but somehow, I don’t think they were childhood sweethearts. Anyway, he took over his father’s fishing trawler when he got out of high school; she was a good daughter and helped her widowed mother run the corner grocery until he’d saved up enough to marry her. Now that their seven children are grown up, with dozens of grandchildren, he’s turned over the thriving fishing business—three trawlers now—to his sons. The four daughters are all married, and Mama and Papa are going back to Portugal at last, to spend their sunset years in the old village, rich Americans!” She grinned at him in triumph.

The perspiring old man below, in his shiny blue suit and tight necktie, dumped the suitcases on deck and put an arm around the narrow shoulders of his frail looking wife, careful not to disturb the corsage of carnations and a gladiolus on the ruffle of her perspiration-stained polka dot dress.

“Rich?” Simon Bede looked doubtfully at his companion. Even Helen was celebrating the crossing to Lisbon on the rusty old *Enrique Dos* with a new denim skirt and canvas shoulder bag, even Helen, who seldom paid any attention to style, having her own, and never to fashion. She had solemnly told him she had also bought a new pair of sneakers—“for best.” The old man seated his panting wife on a bench in the shade of the funnel and took her

hat, which she had put on her lap, and began to fan her with it. "Rich in affection, of course, but—?"

"Don't let the dreary duds fool you; they're frugal people, this couple. Don't you see, they took the bus down from New Bedford to New York and didn't let one of the sons waste gas money to drive them here. Look, her feet and ankles are all puffed up, I'll bet they had those hot seats over the rear wheel on the bus. Poor thing, varicose veins, too. Standing over the laundry tub all these years." And indeed, an unmistakable blue and white Greyhound schedule fluttered in the old man's big hands among other papers as he produced tickets and passports for the captain, who had been eyeing them from the railing farther up the deck.

"Helen, you're too clever by half. Wait. Those expensive looking parcels she's clutching?"

"Presents, dumb-dumb, gifts for the old aunts and young cousins back home. Oh, look, the gangplank's being hauled up! We're only four passengers then, we'll have the ship to ourselves." Small sweating sailors were dealing with lashings and cables, and somewhere under their feet Helen and Simon felt, rather than heard, the exciting change of throb and vibration that meant engines busying themselves, preparing to shift into real work instead of idling in harbor. "Helen, I—" but Simon's voice was drowned out by the three deep, piercing shrieks of the whistle heralding the *Enrique Dos* leaving its dock.

The couple on the deck below jumped in alarm as the captain threw back his head and roared with laughter at their fright; the woman adjusted her dress and pushed her thick-lensed glasses back up her nose, bending to the shopping bags that had tumbled to the deck. The captain thumped the old man on the shoulder and strolled forward to the companionway leading to the bridge, leaving the couple to find their cabin themselves.

"Ten whole glorious days at sea, Simon," Helen crowed as the freighter backed into the river and fell into the ebbing tide, heading toward the Narrows. "Much more fun than flying over, you're so smart to have thought of this." She put her arm around his waist and laid her head, with its shaggy, grizzling hair, on his shoulder. He looked down at her face, rich with the texture of much weather and all of living.

"You sound sad, my love."

"Not that. It's just Lady Liberty ahead there, she puts a lump in my throat every time. And think what she must mean to them

now." She gestured toward the deck below where the shabby, elderly couple were looking up, too, at the great statue and holding hands like children.

"Not dressing for dinner the first night out does make sense, doesn't it?" Helen pulled a fresh cotton T-shirt over her head. "It gives Griselda—she's down in steerage, of course—time to unpack all the trunks and press my dinner gowns and luncheon frocks; remind me to tell her to save the silver lamé for the Captain's Gala—or do you think that'll be a costume affair?"

"Costume, surely. You must wear something Oriental and go as Scheherezade, you're that full of fantasy. Excuse me—" Simon squeezed between the two narrow little bunks to hang his black suit in the minuscule closet. "I had no idea these cabins would be so small; if there were steerage it could hardly be worse. Do you think we'll survive?"

"We'll survive." Helen assumed as much of a pretzel shape as possible to make room for Simon to wash his face in the tiny basin while she reached around him to find her other sandal under her bunk. "My God, it's hot, though. I guess we can hook the door open at night, there might be more breeze that way through the porthole. Oh, dear, what's that?"

The next cabin was separated from theirs only by a highly varnished but thin wood partition; muffled groans and sobs came through, and then the unmistakable sound of retching. "It's little Mama—something she ate at a pit stop on the turnpike, she can't be seasick with this flat ocean. Poor thing. Well, Simon my love, shall we dine?"

"I think we do not wait any longer." Ricardo Mateus, the first mate, nodded to the steward, who began serving the three of them plates of thick, anonymous soup. He looked up at a hesitant movement in the doorway. "Ah, good, here is Senhor Santos, at least." He put down his napkin, stood, and bowed politely as the old man came shyly into the small dining saloon. Ricardo introduced him to the second and third mates and the engineer, who were eating at a second table, "and this is Miss Helen Bullock and Father Simon Bede. Senhor Tomas Santos. Your wife, she does not come to dinner?"

"*Obrigado, obrigado,*" the ruddy-faced Tomas said, shaking

hands and sitting down across from Helen at one of the two empty places. "No, Ynez not good, she no eat tonight, *obrigado*." He tucked a coarse grayish napkin into his tight collar, spread its ample folds over his blue suit, and noisily began enjoying the almost tasteless soup.

"She's probably tired after the bus trip, it must have been very hot, *senhor*," Helen said calmly. Tomas blinked, and looked hopefully at Ricardo, who rapidly translated her question and then his answer.

"Yes, he said it was very hot, and there were many noisy children on the bus." Helen winked at Simon and sipped at the dark, almost gritty, wine. He lifted his empty glass in a private salute to her, and poured everyone more wine from the large carafe in the middle of the table.

"—for *cárgo*?" Ricardo was talking to Simon. "Many things, anything, everything. This trip, some indoor-outdoor carpeting, it is very stylish for our rich in Portugal now to have this carpet for their patios, and we take them shingles of wood for their roofs, too, so then of course we must bring back to America many, of our *azulejos*, our ceramic tiles, for your own rich people's gardens and roofs." He grinned. "But this trip, also fertilizer, some light machinery."

"Not many passengers," Helen picked up the conversation. Simon turned to Tomas and began speaking to him in quiet, fluent Spanish. The old man gleamed with gold teeth and pleasure and replied in the more lisping Portuguese, but they seemed to be able to understand each other. "The other two cabins are both empty, but was I right when I thought I saw a freezer in the one opposite ours? Your fares are so inexpensive I thought this time of year there'd be a full house, students and so forth."

"A late cancellation, a family with children but one became ill, and of course a freighter is not obliged to carry a doctor. The freezer—that cabin was to be closed but Xaime is very busy," Ricardo nodded toward the little steward, "and then the captain, he finds bargains sometimes, souvenirs, and there was no room left in the hold this morning." The pleasant looking young man seemed to hide a smile in his wine glass.

"I hope the captain has—friends, shall we say, in the harbor at Lisbon. The customs duty on such souvenirs is sky high, isn't it?"

"Very high, yes; but—" and he shrugged his shoulders in so charming a manner that Helen assumed all captains, and some-

times first mates, too, had "friends" in harbors. "Please use the fourth cabin if you need room, it is very small down there I know. Perhaps we pick up a passenger when we reach Madeira, but that is not for seven days, and you must be as comfortable as you can."

"How nice. Perhaps Simon will, he has a mess of paperwork to do. I'd forgotten we stop at Madeira and have a whole day there. Tell me about it. . . ."

They were all perspiring freely, Simon in a thin Indian cotton tunic, Ricardo in his short sleeved white uniform. Tomas in his thick suit was frankly streaming as he mopped at his face and jowls with his napkin. "What is that you're putting on the—" Helen stopped, she couldn't tell what Xaime had served them except that it was putty white, dull red, and swimming in oil.

"Vinegar. It is very good on our food, especially the dried *bacalao*—dried codfish." Ricardo passed her the ample cruet, and after her first taste she decided it was the only possible way to surmount the ancient oil the fish was cooked in, and added more. "I see the captain keeps up the tradition of not dining with the passengers the first night out?"

"Captain Bragança, he keeps to his cabin very much always, and always when the last loading is finished like today; I am in charge of everything then."

"I see." Helen had noticed an unmistakable air-conditioner installed in the porthole of the large forward cabin labelled "Captain," and as Xaime handed around a pudding made from canned milk, she felt she knew exactly where were being served the fresh provisions she had seen being brought on board that noon.

"It's death by vinegar, darling." Helen belched as she stretched lengthwise on a bench under a lifeboat. The *Enrique Dos* did not seem to possess deck chairs.

"You told me we'd survive. But I think just barely." Simon groaned, lowering himself to the deck and leaning back against her. "One boon, though."

"What?" The sea hissed slowly by, rustling quietly against the old hull in the dark, warm night.

"At least we won't gain weight by overeating, not on this ship."

Helen smiled to herself, and forebore to point out that there was someone worse off than they were. From the porthole down the deck she could hear poor Ynez heaving up what she hoped was the last of the tainted hamburger or whatever she had eaten on the

bus trip that was making her so ill. What she very much hoped was the last, or nobody would get any sleep at all.

Three days later Helen, past the sunburn stage and well into the happy dark tan Simon loved, hung over the railing of the ship in full content; the metal was sizzling hot and she moved her forearms constantly, but beneath in the indigo sea a school of dolphins were playfully flashing, racing ahead of the ship, butting the hull with their shining heads, and flipping arcs of joyous spray into the hot, sunlit air. Farther down the deck Simon and Tomas were watching, too, Tomas as excited as if the old fisherman had never seen such things. Simon had taken Tomas under his wing, encouraging him to shed his blue suit and be comfortable and casual in shirtsleeves and old trousers; Simon was learning some Portuguese and, since he was an avid sailor when he had the time, was working on his celestial navigation with Ricardo as well as assembling and editing his report to the archbishop at Lambeth on the world population crisis. Busy, busy, Helen smiled to herself; if we suddenly did decide to get married after all this time, he'd certainly be too busy to have Captain Bragança tie the knot.

She frowned; a horrible man, the captain, she thought, turning from the rail and heading down to their cabin for a scarf. Bragança had come into dinner the second night, unmistakably drunk and carrying a waterglass full of whisky. He roared with what, even in Portuguese, Helen could tell were coarse jokes to the engineer and mates at their table, deliberately tripped Xaime from under the table so that the pathetic little steward slithered across the floor, narrowly missing spilling a bowl of stewed onions and banging his head painfully on a door jamb. Helen could tell by the "business as usual" demeanor in the room that the men were overaccustomed to their captain; they continued their meal with only ritual responses and forced chuckles at the jokes, and Xaime continued serving with only a widened radius around the captain.

"Ha!" Captain Bragança had addressed himself to Helen with his mouth full, his white jacket unbuttonable across an expanse of greasy undershirt. "I bet you think we eat nothing but codfish, hey? Tonight we eat better, I tell you."

"That'll be nice," Helen had nodded coolly, wishing the cook could have done the pork chops on her plate in something other than the same antique oil that had graced the beans and eggs and sardines at lunch, and philosophically added vinegar.

"Salad. You Americans eat salad all the time." He took a plate from Xaime and shoved it before her: crisp green lettuce, dark ripe tomatoes, and black olives. It was beautiful and there was not a drop of oil, or of vinegar, on it.

"What lovely salad, wonderful when the weather's so hot!" She reached for a fork.

His bloodshot eyes gleamed under puffy lids as he took a pitcher and dribbled its contents thickly over Helen's lettuce. "Oh, this is not so hot, much hotter later." And a moment later, when she was sure the top of her head had not actually blown off and her throat was not quite utterly incinerated, she managed a wide smile to answer the captain's roar of laughter. "Here, captain, that dressing is so delicious you must have some on your chops," and she up-ended the rest of the oil, which he must have drained from a can of the hottest chili peppers in the world, onto his plate. She watched him push down his anger and grit his teeth until Xaime brought him a fresh drink; he swigged from it generously and then hissed at her: "You no eat your salad?"

"I'm sorry, captain, I forgot. I'm fasting tonight, religious reasons."

"Religious reasons!" He had snorted, pushing her plate aside as if that particular game were over, with reluctant honors to Helen. "You and your man, this English priest here, you not married but you share same cabin? What kind religion is that, hey? You're a bad boy, Father Bede, maybe I tell your *obispo*, your bishop." He took another swill of whisky and laughed, spewing them all with a fine spray of scotch.

"Ah, my bishop is a very stern man, captain." Helen could see that Simon was churning with fury inside for her sake, but he was, after all, a professional diplomat in essence; he had had years of seasoning in dealing with much more vulgar and important fools than this clot. "He is quite aware that I travel with Miss Bullock; in point of fact, he insists upon it."

"What?"

"Yes indeed, captain. As a penance. A heavy, heavy penance for us both, I assure you. Miss Bullock steals the pillows, and I snore, heavily." And he had turned calmly to Ricardo and begun to speak of the questionable navigational value of sonar on a small sailboat. Helen grinned at Ricardo, who was embarrassed as only the young can be when a so-called superior disgraces himself, and watched the young man's red face begin to assume a less anguished color as Simon chatted on. Bragança had put down his empty glass,

jerked at his tight belt, and stumbled clumsily out of the saloon.

Now as she entered the dark corridor to the cabins, she paused for a moment to accustom her eyes to the gloom after the bright deck; the captain's freezer loomed in the empty cabin and she stuck out her tongue at it, hoping the man would stay drunk in his cool cabin and spare them all his horrible practical jokes and ghastly humor for the rest of the trip. Even if it meant no more salad.

She heard Xaime in her own cabin, busily sweeping and flapping sheets and towels. She stepped into the empty one to wait until he finished, and leaned against the freezer; the white metal was cool and welcome to her bare legs, and she idly noted a label pasted on it: "27 rua Fatima, Lisboa." Beyond it, on the bunk under the porthole, were cartons of television sets and four boxes of new headphone cassette players. An enterprising man, the captain.

The ship shuddered unexpectedly for a moment and she grabbed the freezer's handle for support, finding it open. She raised the lid without thinking, and caught her breath. The freezer was full of drugs.

Drugstore drugs, pharmaceuticals. Penicillin, Aureomycin, Tetramycin, Salk and Sabin vaccines, tetanus and typhoid and diphtheria vaccines, all of them already rendered useless by the heat; things like that had to be under refrigeration or they lost their effectiveness. She dropped the lid furiously; that bastard, with his own air-conditioner in his cabin, would smuggle these things into Portugal without taking the trouble at least to plug in the freezer; he would sell them in their pristine Upjohn and Squibb and Pfizer containers anyway, and if some kid somewhere got tetanus or diphtheria or polio, who would know how or why? Not Bragança, with his "friends" in harbors, that was for sure. Those friends would probably get a headphone set as thanks for their blind eyes.

"Senhora. Your cabin is clean now, I leave you a tomato and two peaches from last night, senhora, I am sorry—" The little steward stood outside with his mop and bucket and laundry bag.

"Xaime, you're an absolute angel, *obrigado, obrigado!*" He nodded, pleased and reassured that Helen understood the problems in the galley and dining room, and went on his way.

As Helen passed the Santos's cabin she saw that the door, for once, was hooked open, and for once there was no sound of misery coming from it. In spite of the Dramamine Helen had given Tomas yesterday, Ynez had still not come to meals or left her cabin; she must be one of those unfortunate people who get seasick in a bath-

tub. Helen looked in quite frankly at the wispy little woman lying on the bed, the workworn hands holding a rosary languidly on the bosom of her drab nightgown, her dentures in a glass beside her. The odor of the cabin pushed against the open doorway, a miasma of heat and sweaty pillows, of stomach ailments and stale tea, tea from the endless trays Xaime had brought, of Tomas's blue suit hanging in the little closet and Ynez's graying and surely unnecessary corsets folded on the little dresser top that held only a single family portrait with vineyards and tiled roofed houses in the background, and two passports.

"Hello, Ynez, I'm Helen, Helen Bullock." The invalid turned her head abruptly toward the door and put on her thick glasses. The poor thing's walleys, too, Helen noted, on top of everything else. "Can I do anything for you? The Dramamine doesn't help? More tea, then, or maybe some soup? There's a nice cool spot in the shade on deck, you'd feel so much better if you came outside for a while."

"No, no tea. Tomas is spending so much on tea for me, and toast, we shouldn't afford it." Helen was glad that Ynez, at least, spoke English, although it would be easier to understand if she had her teeth in.

"But Ynez, everything's all paid for on your ticket, anything you want, it's all free. Oh, we're expected to give a little tip to Xaime when we get to Lisbon, but that's all. Truly. Everything's paid for, wine, food, service."

"Even when Xaime brings things here to the cabin, it don't cost?"

Helen smiled inside at the sharp peasant carefulness in Ynez, rather admiring it. The poor thing probably never had been on an airplane either, and she was not only sick but homesick for her children and grandchildren, and then worrying that Tomas was extravagant, with "room service." She was touched, also, by the dead carnations from her corsage that Ynez was trying to save. The water in the glass that held them was a sad, scummy green.

"Of course, no charge for anything. Just a tip to Xaime at Lisbon, that's all." She smiled and sat down on Tomas's bunk, reached over and helped the old woman to pull a pillow up behind her sweaty back. The nightgown slipped aside and Helen saw a large birthmark running from her shoulder down one breast, faded now like the rest of Ynez: "Let me run you a bath, the tub's just down the corridor; have a nice cool bath and then come out in the air for a while. Xaime can clean your cabin then."

"A bath!" Something like pleasure flitted across the lined gray face. "A bath. It's free, too? I have our towels, and soap." A little

pride showed in her wan face.

"You do plan ahead well, don't you? But there are dozens of towels, and lots of soap, all free."

"Good. Yes, I like a bath. And tell you a secret, Helen, you are such a nice lady. We can save on the tip to Xaime in Lisbon because Tomas and I, we get off the ship before, in Madeira!"

Simon had found out that the sailors, whose forepeak must be more stifling even than the passenger cabins, all had inflatable mattresses and slept on the midship hatch in the open. With Xaime's help he moved the hard, heavy mattresses from the empty cabin onto the foredeck, and from the third night out they slept in the cool sea air, the light from the bridge shaded by a lifeboat and the stars almost exaggerated in their size, washing the ship in bright silver light. And the quiet susurrus of the bow wave along the hull was considerably pleasanter to go to sleep by than the tossings and turnings of Ynez and Tomas, audible through the scanty partition between their cabins.

"Six days now, Simon, and I did get her to have baths, but she still hasn't set foot out of her cabin and she's still seasick—on this flat ocean." Helen shook out her blanket and sheets and began organizing her bed for the night. Suddenly both she and Simon were doubled over in fits of sneezing and running noses and eyes. "God damn him, he put *pepper* in our bedding!" she gasped as soon as she caught her breath. Simon stifled his sneezing and led her into the fresher air near the side.

"Hush, don't give him the satisfaction—he is the ultimate swine, though. Breathe deeply. Better? Stay here a minute and I'll finish shaking out the things."

Helen wiped her running eyes with the hem of her bathrobe and tried to calm herself; the captain was good for at least one practical joke a day, and more if he weren't too drunk. Vinegar in the wine carafe one lunchtime, a showerhead full of indelible India ink for Ricardo, and the back of his neck and ears and hands were still an ashy gray, and something disastrous in the galley. The cook now wore a thick^{ly} swathed bandage on his forearm.

"Come along, pepper's all gone, we're safe for another ten hours." Simon pulled a blanket up for her. "And you're not to feel so hopeless about Ynez, she's out of her cabin tonight at last, she and Tomas are sitting on the bench outside the saloon, holding hands and he's singing to her."

"Oh, that's sweet, Simon—he's really singing to her?"

"Nice soothing little ditties, quite charming. All cuddled up in the dark. And at least Bragança hasn't played any pranks on them. Where's my pillow, you haven't pinched it again, have you?"

"Here it is, don't panic. Well, that's nice. Maybe she'll eat something tomorrow. I'm glad that drunken bastard's leaving them alone, at least. Tomas is such a dear old man, isn't he?"

"Yes, gentle and uncomplicated. A pity his English isn't better, you'd enjoy talking to him. He knows quite a bit about the wines of Madeira; I must see about picking up a few bottles while we're there. He tells me there are still a few available of wine made from pre-phyloxera vines, if you know where to go. Madeira travels well, too, they used to ship it around the world as ballast for two years before it was deemed drinkable—"

"Ugh. Madeira's always tasted to me like the rich man's Southern Comfort, but—" Helen yawned widely. "Funny after all those years fishing out of New Bedford his English isn't any better, but those immigrant communities stick together so much. Good night, love." As if to punctuate her words, an empty bottle was thrown from the captain's porthole and smashed against the rail.

When Simon was finally sound asleep, Helen, aching with fatigue herself, slipped out from under her blanket and quietly crossed the foredeck to go below "to the head, darling" as she had explained to Simon for the past several nights, "damn that vinegar."

With such fury that it was almost a noise, Helen glared across the table that held her almost-completed jigsaw puzzle. The captain lounged messily in the corner, holding a tall glass of whisky in one hand and a reeking cigar in the other. The overhead light in the little saloon was garish, the smell of dinner from the dining saloon next door—dubious sausage, canned cauliflower—was still abundant, and the captain had been rambling on drunkenly for the half hour it had taken Helen to reassemble the progress she had so far made on the puzzle.

"You've been helping with my puzzle, I see, captain," she finally acknowledged. In fact, the bits of cardboard had been pushed askew, some on the floor; all the work she had done on the village fiddlers and bridesmaids had been pulled apart. The bride's bouquet, the center of the rustic wedding scene, was so far still missing.

"Don't like your puzzle. Cute, sentimental, garbage, that's what. Country wedding. Garbage." He belched and blew a fog of smoke at the ceiling.

"I take it you're not a family man, then." Helen was reassembling the upper corners as best she could; wishing he would finally go away. From the porthole outside she heard Tomas humming a little tune, and somehow she could feel that his Ynez was sitting with him in the dark night, a little less miserable.

"Family man! Hah! Not this man. I got tricked once, very young, wet behind the ears—" Oh, won't he shut up or pass out, Helen groaned inwardly. She refused to get up and leave herself and so disturb the Santosos' quiet peace, but the captain's stories had been excruciating so far. "Friend of mine, some friend, did me a big favor, a big big favor, he helped me not go to jail, just some little bit whisky smuggling long time ago, so okay, he give me alibi, save my hide but made me promise to marry his sister—he say she was young, good girl, good dowry, so what the hell, I say okay, but she was a pig, a little, scrawny, stupid, ugly pig, horrible like sin and the devil's mark on her, too, she look crazy alla the time, so her brother trick me. Hah, I trick him. I marry her all right and sleep with her for a week, then I send her back to her brother, kick her back, and keep her dowry, so in the end I play better trick on brother, hah?"

"Yeah. You sure did."

"That a long long time past, many things long past," he brooded, his head sagging in jerks to his chest, but then he threw his head back and laughed coarsely. "Long time past, too, since I make confession, in church; Tomas he ask us all, me too, to his village when we get to Madeira tomorrow, big welcome party they gonna throw, eating, drinking, dancing. I gonna go, Tomas tell me his brother is priest in village, so I make confession, then I eat and drink and dance too but maybe not, maybe there be no party after all—" His hard brazen voice had been almost shouting, but then he turned sly, whispering, "You're smart, you don't get married, you just have fun, hey!"

"Yeah. Hey." Helen stood up and stubbed out her cigarette. She had just heard Tomas and Ynez shuffling back down the deck.

"You gonna watch the shooting stars on deck tonight? Rico, he say everybody gonna be up there at midnight, it's the Le—Leo—"

"Leonids. Yes, sure. We're all going to watch. Goodnight, captain, see you in the morning."

Helen was sure it was the bottle of Madeira, interspersed with the bottle of bourbon she had brought up to the deck, that was exciting Tomas so much. He kept pulling on Rico's and Simon's

arms and pointing to another and yet another shooting star as the great shower of the Leonids punctuated the midnight sky. She'd thought the pod of whales they had seen the day before was the ultimate phenomenon for him; he must be relishing what would very probably be his last sight of the sea's familiar largesse on this trip. All his excitement must be his way of saying goodbye, goodbye.

"He says they're better than any fireworks," Simon sighed after a particularly brilliant meteor had burned its way across the heaven.

"Yes, they're fantastic at sea, aren't they. Oh dear, I've got to go below again, don't knock over my drink—"

She was feeling the bourbon herself a bit, and was more than a bit sleepy; she had decided not to wait until Rico and Tomas had exhausted the stars and Simon was asleep. She could finish her self-imposed task in a short time now.

But the corridor below was not dark as usual, it was lit from Ynez's open door. Damnit, Helen thought, she had been so sure Ynez would be asleep as always. Then she smelled whisky, and saw Ynez's gnarled hand reach down and pick up a tea mug that had rolled to her door sill, spilling an amber stream on the linoleum. "She's getting drunk, poor thing, should I get Tomas?" She stood in the dark doorway of her own cabin, uncertain but compassionate, and then as Ynez's arm reached up and pulled the door closed, Helen decided to leave it alone; every other cure for her seasickness had been tried, and it couldn't be solved by looking at shooting stars anyway.

There was still time, though, for the next to last load, and Helen quickly felt her way to the freezer, opened it, and reached far in to the almost empty bottom. She loaded her canvas bag with as many medicines as it would hold; they were almost all gone now after her nightly "little trips to the loo." She scrambled with her bag up the steep staircase to the deck, tossed the boxes and ampoules and bottles as far overboard as possible. "Screw you too, Captain B.," she whistled to herself as she heard faint plops in the passive sea. "At least some kids won't get useless vaccinations." There was still time for the very last load, but when she padded quietly back to the cabins she began to feel the effects of the bourbon and of Tomas's Madeira, which she had sipped only for politeness' sake, and a sudden spasm of action in her tummy as well as a slight reeling of her head caused her to groan inwardly. She scurried swiftly to the W.C., noting only vaguely that she had, after all, closed the freezer lid so that was all right, too agonized

with internal imperatives to see Ynez's frightened face far inside the door of her inky dark cabin.

It was a totally different Ynez from any one Helen had thought possible who stood on the deck of the *Enrique Dos* in Funchal, the harbor of Madeira, the next morning. From her lace garden hat and suit, in a shade Helen always referred to as "mauvender," topped with a beige fur stole, to her high-heeled open-toed shoes she was a-glitter, not only with the rhinestones on her new eyeglass frames but with the "pearls" that rested on her flat bosom and that flashed as white as her dentures. She and Tomas smiled and waved at a large group calling to them from the pier below. Her ruffle-edged summer gloves waved back in regal time, quite like Queen Elizabeth. Good girl, Helen thought, she hasn't a ghost of a hangover even after drinking on an empty stomach last night—impressive guts, that's what she's got.

Simon had put on his clerical suit in honor of the party; Helen went below with second thoughts about her own clothes. And for another thing, if she were going to spend the day in the countryside she wanted some Off to keep flies away from her bare legs. Xaime had locked the door to the empty cabins and urged Helen and Simon to lock theirs for the first time. "In port, many many bad peoples come on ship, you lock, yes?" but the door to the Santos'es cabin was open. Xaime had taken their luggage on deck and the bunks were piled with sheets and towels; there was a coat hanger lying on the floor, and the wastebasket was tipped over, holding a cracked heavy crockery ship's ware teapot. Ynez must have pressed her dead corsage in with her other things, the glass held only the green water now. Suddenly Helen stopped, and looked again. No, there hadn't been anything of note on the dresser or in the cabin, nothing at all, the day she had comforted Ynez about expenses and helped her have a bath. Nothing but two passports of different colors, American and Portuguese, and the folded corsets, and the single photograph of the family in Madeira. There had been no pictures or snapshots of the large Santos family back in the States, no Polaroid shot of the newest grandchild tucked into the mirror, no proud photograph of the high-stooped old house on Mechanic Street with the new Buick in front. Well, she shrugged, there's no accounting for sentiment. Helen, ruthlessly free of possessions that could possess her, still always traveled with a buffalo nickel in a shabby, tiny leather purse; the Indian's profile reminded her of her Uncle Murray. There was a dried, cracked acorn tucked away with

it, and even she couldn't remember why it was her good luck piece, or when or how it had become so. And whether or not Simon were with her, there was always an old broken cufflink of his that gave her comfort and cheer.

Ynez might not be sentimental in predictable ways, but she certainly was flying her flag high this morning, she and Tomas were proud of their triumphant return. Helen hastily stripped off the casual skirt and old blue shirt of Simon's she had thoughtlessly put on this morning, and dressed herself quickly in a silk and linen jersey shift, found a gold chain and earrings, remembered the Off, and closed the cabin door behind her, feeling like a distinct credit to the Santosos instead of an overage hippie.

On the way out she nearly collided with Xaime. He was bending over, picking up something from the floor of the corridor. "Yours, *senhora*?" he said, holding out to her one of the missing pieces from the jigsaw puzzle, one from the bride's bouquet.

"You really let me get egg all over my face, didn't you?" Helen fumed, pulling herself up the gangplank in the dark night after a harum-scarum ride in the village's one taxi down through the vineyard-planted hills to the harbor. "Ynez and Tomas. Bride and groom. Newlyweds. Just Married. *Recem Casado!* I don't think I'll speak to you again until—"

"Helen darling, you were having *such* a splendid time with your fantasy that they were old marrieds with that huge family in New Bedford, going home for their declining years—why should I have spoiled it?"

"Hah. There you were, jabbering away with Tomas and knowing all for seven whole days, and never said a word to me. Especially about why Ynez was seasick the whole way over, that she was nervous about meeting her MOTHER-IN-LAW! How could I have guessed that, at their age? Well, of course I should have—no mementoes of the past or snapshots of the kids for Ynez to show me, Tomas not speaking English and behaving like it was his first trip on the sea because it *was* his first trip on the sea, he's not a fishing captain at all and never has been. Oh, what a dunce—"

The *Enrique Dos* was late leaving Funchal in the morning; Helen had slept late but the ship's departure was later, and she took her last cup of coffee out on deck to watch the long, rocky, green-topped cliffs of Madeira glide past in the morning sun, the water fingering into caves on the shoreline beneath

vertical bluffs of stone.

"You managed to sleep through all the turmoil." Simon had seated himself crosslegged on the deck beside her. "The captain's missing, you'll be interested to know. Rico and the crew have scoured the ship from stem to stern and, I gather, all the waterfront bars, but Bragança's gone to earth somewhere. Rico thought he'd simply skipped the welcome home party and gone on a prolonged toot on shore—not uncommon for him—but this time they can't find him. Rico doesn't dare delay getting the cargo to Lisbon, there's some sort of deadline or penalty clause for late delivery. And there's a daily flight from Funchal to Lisbon; when Bragança comes to himself he can be with the ship in no time."

"That's funny, a captain missing his own ship. Well, it couldn't happen to a more horrible man, and think of the hangover he'll have! Serves him right. He's no loss at all, Rico does all the work anyway."

"How are you feeling yourself, after our debauch yesterday?"

"Better than I deserve; that local *vinho verde* gets to you, doesn't it? Wonderful fun, though, the roast kid was heavenly, and you could tell Ynez got off on the right foot from the start with that crystal rosary she brought Tomas's mother. The very thing. You spent enough time gabbing with her new brother-in-law, the priest; was he pleased with the candlesticks for the altar?"

"Very. As much as he could let himself show, he's a bit of a grim old tortoise, I'm afraid. But yes, Ynez got herself off on a good wicket, I think."

"Simon?"

"Hmm?"

"They love each other very much, don't they? They'll be very happy?"

"Of course, no question. He told me about the romance during the trip, you know. He's a widower, those were some of his sons and daughters on the pier yesterday morning, but his wife died decades ago and he's been lonely. He went to Boston this spring to visit his sister after he retired from his wine business and met Ynez there. She'd been keeping house for her brother all her life, the old maid, you know, squeezed into smaller and smaller bedrooms as the brother married and the babies came along, washing up the dishes, doing the laundry, just old Aunt Ynez. And then, suddenly, Tomas, visiting the family across the street. He said he met her at church, and that was that, a true *coup de foudre*. 'A mature woman is like a ripe melon,' he told me. 'She must be a

little crusty and wrinkled on the outside, but is all the sweeter and better within.' ”

“Oh, Simon, how lovely. And think, how wonderful for her. She must have given up hope years and years ago, and then to have him come along—”

Simon soon went whistling his way down the deck toward the bridge, where he was to shoot the noon sun with Ricardo. To have Tomas come along, Helen reflected, a husband at last, loving and adoring, well off and with a place in his community where Ynez—after the first few nervous months—would be a respected wife, stepmother, daughter-in-law, with a house and man of her own. At sixty-five, to have her life come true. Soon she herself would be matriarchal, sit in a black lace mantilla exacting deference and respect from the family, the village.

No, she could not have given that up, she had had to kill Captain Bragança the night before landing, it was the only way of silencing him after she had heard through the porthole that he was planning on coming to the feast and “confessing” to Tomas’s brother, the priest. Confessing indeed, the bastard—he would have exposed her as a bigamist, exposed the whole ugly past, such a brief event so long ago but one that would have blasted all her happiness. Ynez had been the “ugly pig, stupid, looking crazy all the time, with the devil’s mark,” whom he had married out of desperation and opportunism. She had been the straw Bragança had grabbed at and survived by, the straw he had broken and thrown back after taking her virginity and her dowry, all hushed up and forgotten long ago in the large foreign community in Boston. That birthmark on Ynez’s bosom—yes, faded now but very much in the shape of a cloven hoof, the devil’s mark, and her poor walleyed look.

No wonder Ynez, whom Bragança had recognized when she boarded at Brooklyn, even after all that time, had been “seasick” all the way; sick with anxiety and worry, knowing his hatefulness and delight in jokes and cruel tricks. She knew he would expose her to Tomas, to his village; the captain could be sure that a girl as devout as herself would have had no annulment, nor even thought of one, and of course divorce was unthinkable.

The whisky smell had been the captain’s, not Ynez’s; he had come below thinking the rest were on the foredeck looking at the stars, he had come to taunt her about ruining her life the next day, and she had killed him. A good peasant killing, with strong cunning and an arm strong enough to smash the heavy teapot over his head, knocking him out, and then very likely simply suffocating him

with a pillow. It would not have been difficult. Ynez was indeed purposeful, even if she was so tiny, and the captain had been drunk. He had been drunk for years.

Two mornings later Helen watched the last of the cargo swung outboard and laid in the rows of trucks that had waited for it. The hatches were all open and great bales of cedar shingles were being discharged by winch and crane; the ship was totally disrupted, uncomfortably hot and noisy and occupied by shouting seamen and stevedores, customs agents. Rico was standing near the bridge with a clipboard, a customs officer ticking off reciprocal lists on his own papers. Helen, eager to be ashore and away, was glad of the small breeze from the open doors on the bridge where she was waiting for Simon. He was below, elaborately and leisurely packing up the last of his work on world population; it would be sent to the archbishop by the British Embassy's diplomatic bag as soon as he could get it to them, but he seemed to feel such a privilege obliged him to deal with tape and sealing wax around the parcel.

She shaded her eyes and looked at the waist of the ship; the freezer was loaded onto a coir sling and was being lowered onto the quay where three men in civilian clothes heaved it into a van that already held all but one of the television and headphone sets. The customs agent and Rico grinned and shrugged at each other, the door of the van closed, and it swung away from the busy pier. Helen, too, smiled to herself, and shrugged. No one seemed particularly concerned that there had been no word from the captain from Madeira, at least not yet, so she would not invent worry for herself alone.

Ynez, as fragile as she was, could not have hauled the captain's dead weight to the deck and tumbled him into the sea; the stairs had been too high for that. She had had to trust the label on the freezer, "27 rua Fatima, Lisboa," that assured her the appliance was going to the mainland itself and would not be unloaded in Madeira, or inspected there. She had been right. And, Helen thought, when Bragança's cronies in crime opened the freezer and found their partner, the chances were very small anything would be done. Those outside the law did not dare use the law.

And there was now no problem with Simon. She had found him early this morning puzzling over a crumpled tissue-thin leaflet that had been wrapped around an ampoule or in a vaccine container. Helen had forgotten, during her nightly forays, the open

portholes in the spare cabins that sucked in the air like a veritable ventilator. "Helen, you didn't—"

"Well, yes, Simon," she had glared, "I did. Damnit, yes, I did. Those drugs were all destroyed from the heat, and it's just as dangerous to give a baby a vaccine that's lost its strength as it is to give them none. And think what that ghastly man would probably be smuggling back into the States and probably has been for years—cocaine, heroin, you name it. Of course I emptied out his freezer and threw the stuff overboard."

"Helen, Helen." His arms around her were his medal for courage.

She would never tell Simon about the other, there was no need. Helen felt very strongly that ladies' consciences were infinitely heavier-duty than those of men, and Ynez and she were very heavy-duty ladies. Leave Ynez to heaven, Helen thought, and somehow she was sure heaven would, for Ynez, be very, very benign.

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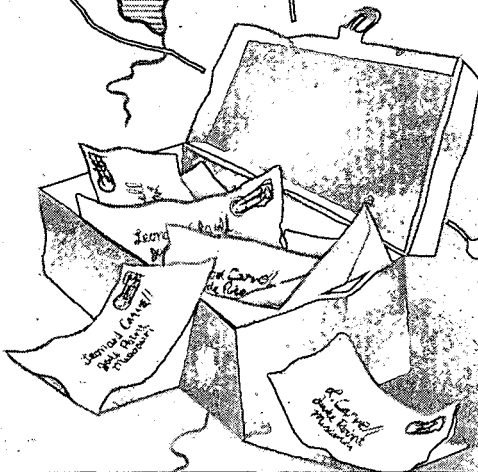
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D2H82

by John Lutz

I wondered about that as I signed the closing papers on our new-old home in Jade Point, Missouri. Jade Point was a small



town, but within commuting distance of Saint Louis, and the house was a three story Victorian monstrosity nearly a hundred years old. Exactly what Effie, my wife, had always wanted to own and renovate. I'd just received a substantial sum from the sale of my advertising agency back east; I could afford, barely, to be indulgent.

We'd bought the house from the estate of an old woman named Beatrice Logan, the last of a proud local family. As soon as we'd moved into the high-ceilinged, deteriorated monster, my wife began to show me what she called the house's "buried treasure." I admit to being impressed. There were corners and alcoves in that house that probably hadn't been looked into in years. Effie came up with rare cut glass, solid brass fixtures buried beneath layers of faded paint, intricately scrolled woodwork now impossibly expensive to duplicate. But the most unexpected thing we found was the box in the basement.

It was a gray metal box, not large or exceptionally heavy, but obviously containing something that didn't rattle when shook.

"See if you can get it open,

Warren," Effie said. "Anything might be inside."

I went to my tool box and got a hammer. One sharp blow, and the box's steel lid sprang open.

Letters. Various papers. Curled and yellowed about the edges. Most of the postmarks were dated in the mid-thirties, the letters addressed to someone named Leonard Carvell. Effie and I read a few of the letters there at the base of the cellar steps. They were personal, at the time not very interesting, with frequent references to someone named Floyd. The handwriting was poor, with many misspelled words and malapropisms, and there was a curious, almost guarded obliqueness to the phrasing.

"These stamps might be worth something," Effie said.

"I think what I'd better do," I told her, replacing the letters and closing the metal lid, "is ask around and see if anyone knows the family. This Leonard Carvell might still be alive or have some survivors who'd want this box."

Effie agreed to the reasonableness of that idea, and the next day I drove in to Jade Point's tiny shopping area and asked in the A&P store and at the post office if anyone had heard of Leonard Carvell or his

family. No one had. And no one had in the Drop-In Tavern next to the barber shop, though I sensed a surprised kind of reticence in some of the old-timers bent over the checkerboard near the end of the long mahogany bar.

"What now?" Effie asked, when I'd returned and stretched out on the antique sofa she'd bought to match the decor of the living room.

"We'll put a classified ad in the Saint Louis papers," I said, shading the light from my eyes with my forearm. Some of the letters in the box had a Saint Louis postmark and were signed simply "Eddie." Strangely, none of the envelopes in the box had a return address.

reply to our ad in the Saint Louis *Post Dispatch*, and I'd almost forgotten about the metal box, when late Tuesday morning the doorbell rang.

Effie was out combing the antique shops in nearby Greenville, so I answered the door to find an old man standing on the wooden porch, smiling nervously, wiping perspiration from his cheeks and forehead with a folded white handkerchief. "Did you place the ad about the Leonard Carvell letters?" he asked in a hesitant but hopeful voice.

I told him I had, told him my name was Warren Aikin, and invited him inside, out of the heat. He was a stooped man, probably in his early seventies,

"I'll pay you a thousand dollars for the box and its contents," he said.

"You word the ad and I'll phone it in for Sunday," Effie said, continuing to apply paint stripper to the curved oak banister.

The box's contents were probably worthless, of only personal interest, but we felt obligated.

For over a week there was no

but still taller than my own six feet. His clothes were threadbare but once expensive, and he still moved well. He looked anxiously around as he entered and sat down in the wing chair near the cold fireplace. There was something fearless and rather desperate in his faded gray eyes.

I waited for him to introduce himself. He didn't.

"I'd like to obtain those letters," he said gently.

"Are you a member of the Carvell family?"

He almost glared at me despite no alteration of his parchment features. "No, I'm not that."

I suspected then he might be an antique dealer or stamp collector trying to make a fast dollar or a valuable find. "Are you a dealer of some sort?" I asked.

He shook his head, saw that I didn't believe him, and said succinctly, "No."

"Then what claim have you to the letters?" I asked.

He wasn't a fool. "I could tell you, Mr. Aikin, but would you believe me?"

"Frankly, not unequivocally. I suspected my ad might attract some antique buffs or dealers, and to be honest with you, I had in mind only turning the box over to a family member. I'm no expert, but it seems to me there isn't any monetary worth there."

The old man seemed to think over what I'd said. He knew that whatever farfetched tale I heard, I would be skeptical, and that I'd require some proof of any claim to Carvell family membership.

"I'll pay you a thousand dol-

lars for the box and its contents," he said calmly.

I was stunned enough to have to sit down. "You know something I don't," I said.

"Do you accept?"

If the old man was willing to pay that much money for the contents of the box, they must be worth something to the Carvell family—if there was any family remaining. I would be selling someone's personal effects, and I began to wonder if that was even legal. I could just see some distraught Carvell materializing in a week or a month to sue me on some charge I couldn't imagine.

"I can't," I said. "I'm sure that eventually some member of the Carvell family will claim the box."

The old man nodded with an odd little smile. "Someone will," he said, and stood, nodded good-bye, and left.

I sat a while wondering who he was. For that matter, did *he* know? There was that cast to his eyes, and his strange manner, that suggested someone living in his own world, almost to the point of mental aberration. He had to be crazy to offer a thousand dollars for a batch of old letters and papers.

On the other hand, I'd have been crazy not to take a closer

look at the contents of the metal box. I locked the front door and went down into the cellar.

Five minutes later, I had the box's contents spread over the dining room table. Mostly old letters; a guarantee on a wristwatch dated January, 1934; a dozen blank title forms for automobiles licensed in the state of Illinois; even a yellowed operating manual for a vacuum cleaner. I began to read the letters, this time all of them, and thoroughly.

It didn't take long for me to discover that Leonard Carvell was also known as Blackie Carvell, and apparently had been an infamous depression era gangster. I was fascinated to conclude that the Floyd referred to in many of the letters was Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd, the notorious bank robber and killer, who had hidden out in a Missouri roadhouse for many months and had even become an accepted part of the community. There was also, folded with a letter in a large envelope, a map of the state of Florida, and stapled to it a detailed map of a small area near central Florida. I held the penciled letter to the light streaming through the curtained windows and read,

"Eddie,

Keep the two pieces in seperet places. Betty L. is fine and will be reddy to travel soon. See you in Chi. or St. Lu.

Blackie"

I saw that the letter, addressed to a Mr. Eddie Pepp at a number on Oakland Avenue in Saint Louis, was stamped but not postmarked. It had never been mailed.

My curiosity was up. When Effie came home I told her something of what had happened and that I was going to drive into Saint Louis tomorrow. She said fine, she was going to Vandalia to see about a brass hall tree for the foyer. She also asked me who the old man was she kept seeing near the house. I told her I had a pretty good idea, but by then she was busy measuring the foyer.

It was easy to find Oakland Avenue in Saint Louis. It was an east-west avenue that ran past a sporting arena, office buildings, a TV station, and to the west some older apartment buildings and a hospital. I estimated that an office building sat at the former site of Carvell's letter to Eddie Pepp.

After parking my car in the lot of a small restaurant on a side street, I walked across the heat-scoured cement, went in-

side, and asked for a hamburger and information. I found that, in the thirties, the address on Oakland Avenue had been that of a large amusement park. Not an unreasonable hideout for a depression era desperado.

When I was finished with the greasy hamburger and a cup of coffee, I drove from the restaurant to the downtown library. I asked the librarian for micro-filmed copies of the mid-thirties Saint Louis papers. Then I sat at one of the microfilm viewers and began to read.

It wasn't hard to piece together the violent career of Leonard "Blackie" Carvell. He'd appeared in the news first in June of 1932 as a murder suspect, avoided trial in that case, but not for the September, 1932, slaying of a tavern owner during a holdup. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in the state penitentiary but escaped en route. In 1933 he went on a bank robbing spree along with two partners, Vern Molako and Eddie Pepp. Molako was killed by police in a small Arkansas town in late 1933, but Pepp continued his partnership with Carvell for the next four years. They robbed several more banks and were suspects in a kidnapping case and a bombing.

In June of 1937 Carvell was shot to death after a Union,

Missouri, bank robbery, surprised by federal agents in a farmhouse outside of Jade Point, Missouri. The June 14, 1937, paper contained a death photo of a lean-faced man with a shock of unruly dark hair. The paper also revealed that the thirty thousand dollars stolen in that robbery, which was committed by two armed men, hadn't been recovered.

I scanned the papers for the next several months of that year. I could find no record of the money's having been found.

When I got back to Jade Point late that afternoon, I kissed Effie hello and made directly for the desk where I'd placed the steel box. I got out the letter to Eddie Pepp and the Florida maps and examined them again.

The larger map was an old Florida road map with a red-penciled route to a town called Oleana; the smaller map was a carefully inked, detailed drawing of what looked to be three roads that formed an obtuse triangle, a number of small squares which no doubt designated houses, and smaller circles and odd shapes within the triangle. There was no scale, and no revealing marks or lettering on the map. In the upper left corner of the paper on which the smaller map was drawn, outside the lined boundaries of the

map, was a small, scrawled, five-pointed star.

None of it meant anything to me.

But when I started to return the letter and maps to the envelope, something hindered me. I looked inside the envelope and found another sheet of folded paper, exactly like the sheet on which the smaller map was drawn. The sheet of paper was blank but for a scrawled star in one corner and an X to the right of center. The star was a replica of the one in the upper left corner of the map paper.

It wasn't long before I caught on. I pressed the map against the inside of a window pane so the light shone through it, then placed the blank paper against it so the stars matched. That rested the X at a spot near the center of the triangle formed by the roads. I held the papers there and used a pin to pierce the center of the X and mark the map beneath.

I knew then that what I had in my hand might be a genuine treasure map, worth thirty thousand dollars. And I could figure out who the old man must have been, and why he kept up his constant watch on the house.

"Effie!" I shouted. "I'm going to Florida!"

She listened to what I had to say and told me I was crazy.

But I went.

Oleana was a small town off Highway 24 with a 2,966 population. I pulled my rental car into the lot of the Oleana Drowsy-Stop Motel and went into the office to register.

Darkness was falling, so after settling into my room, I had dinner at the motel restaurant. Then I went back to my room and tried to make time pass by watching a string of television shows.

The next morning, after a virtually sleepless night, I got in the car and followed Carvell's map to where the roads formed—or used to form—a triangle. The area had become part of central Florida's pattern of progress.

The three roads were still there, but one of them was now a four-lane highway. I was in orange grove country. The medium-sized, almost uniformly shaped dark green trees dotted with bright orange stretched nearly from horizon to horizon. Letting the car roll upgrade at idle speed, I reached a relatively high spot and parked to survey the area of the small map.

Most of the houses on the map were gone, but I was excited to see in the approximate

spot of the map's X a large and unusual rock formation whose shape matched precisely the shape of one of the figures on the map. The neat rows of orange trees had parted widely there to miss it and I also saw what appeared to be a thick tree trunk. I checked the map and found a circle drawn to designate a tree exactly where the stump rose angled from the ground. Even from where I sat it was simple to make out the area of the map's X, near the tapered end of the rock formation.

I'd had the foresight to bring a spade in the car's trunk, and I parked on the road shoulder and walked with the spade toward the rock formation. There was no one around; the nearest building was over a quarter of a mile away and appeared deserted. The only sound among the brightly sunlit orange trees was the occasional whir of unseen traffic on the nearby four-lane highway. I determined what I thought was the exact spot of the X, and plunged the shovel into the soft, powdery earth to mark it. Then I rolled up my sleeves and began to dig.

Within ten minutes, I struck what appeared to be a pipe jutting upward to ground level. At first I thought it might be an irrigation pipe, but I saw that

it was rusted and the end was stuffed with dirt. I began to dig harder.

What I discovered after an hour's hard digging was the lid of a rotted wooden box approximately two by five feet. From each end of the box jutted a rusted pipe toward the earth's surface; perhaps markers. There was a hasp and padlock on the box's lid, but rust and time had worked their deterioration, and I easily sprung the black-pitted hasp from the moldering wood with one stroke of the shovel.

Grinning inanely, still struggling for breath, I bent and flung open the box's rotted lid.

There was no money in the box—it contained the bones of a child.

I felt my face contort stiffly as I drew back, scrambled up the sloping, sandy side of the hole I'd dug. Standing numbly at the edge of the hole, I found that I couldn't avert my gaze from the horror.

Alongside the head of the skeleton were the moldering remains of what looked like a small, battery operated pump. I knew then that the two pipes were for air, and that the child had been buried alive. Near the colorless tattered clothing that still clung to the bones were a tarnished heart-shaped locket

and some crumpled papers.

The sound behind me made me wheel so suddenly that I almost slipped and fell back into the hole I'd dug.

The old man I had talked to in Jade Point was standing there, pointing an ancient long-barreled revolver in my direction. But he was gazing past me, into the hole.

"You trailed me all the way down here. . . ." I said unbelievably.

"I had to." The light of unreason I'd noticed in his eyes shone now brighter than before. On each side of his drawn lips, the sagging flesh of his cheeks was twitching.

A car door slammed, and we both turned toward the sound.

"He followed me. . . ." I heard the old man say in a soft, tragic voice touched with fear.

A plain white sedan was parked nearby, and a short, grayhaired man was striding toward us with a shotgun slung beneath his right arm. He was absurdly paunchy, walking with much effort, his legs pumping with rubbery uncertainty on the powdery earth.

I turned and found that the old man was gone. Then I saw him beyond the orange trees, hobbling with fear-born speed toward where his car must have been parked.

The dumpy, grayhaired man had walked up beside me and we both stood and watched the old man disappear beyond the trees.

"No point chasing him now," the man said, as we heard the racing whine of a car engine. There was a hint of strained control in his voice.

Dazed by the unfolding of events, I looked at the man. He was in his late sixties, with an open, deeply etched face and vivid blue eyes that had seen too much too long, eyes that contained a deep-set desperation.

"Sheriff Seth Davis," he said by way of introduction, "Oleana County. Who are you?"

I told him in a stammering voice. "What . . . what is all this?" I asked.

"It's the remains of the Bosner girl," he said. "Six-year-old Sissy Bosner was kidnapped from her wealthy family in Miami in 1937 and held for a hundred thousand dollars ransom. It was never paid. Two men named Carvell and Pepp were suspected, but nothing was ever proved for lack of evidence."

"Carvell and Pepp. . ." I said. "My God, they buried her alive, let her. . ." I turned and gazed at the spot where the old man had disappeared beyond the or-

ange-dotted trees, driven by decades-old fear and guilt.

"You let me know where you're staying, Mr. Aikin, and go on back there. I'll need you later for a statement."

I nodded, gave him the information he requested, and drove back to the motel, trying not to think about the terror that must have passed through a six-year-old mind, buried alive in darkness with each breath a searing agony. Whatever compassion I might have had for Eddie Pepp disappeared.

I expected Sheriff Davis to appear at my Oleana motel that afternoon, but he didn't. And he didn't show up that evening. Or the next morning.

In the motel restaurant, as I read the morning paper, I understood why.

Thick black lettering low on the front page told me that Owen Bosner, aged, wealthy, one-time king of the Florida citrus processing industry, had hanged himself in an Orlando hotel. Mr. Bosner had become almost a total recluse after personal tragedy in the mid-thirties. After his six-year-old daughter Sibyl Ann (Sissy) Bosner was kidnapped, Owen Bosner decided that the kidnappers were bluffing and refused to pay the demanded ransom. Though depression era

gangsters Edward Pepp and Leonard (Blackie) Carvell were suspected of the crime, charges were never brought because Sissy Bosner was never found and had supposedly been seen alive and well on a Chicago street corner by a distant relative. Only that reported sighting by what seemed to be a reliable witness prevented kidnapping and murder charges.

Intimates of Owen Bosner said that he was haunted by his decision for the rest of his life, living in seclusion and employing a full-time staff to scour daily copies of virtually every newspaper in the country for some clue to his lost daughter's fate. This quest apparently came to dominate his life and in his mind became the sole reason for his existence.

But what interested me most was the photograph of Owen Bosner, taken in 1976, a melancholy likeness marked by the tragic uncertainty and guilt that must have dogged him into the waning hours of his life.

Bosner and I had met at my house in Jade Point, Missouri. I knew he had found the truth he had so long feared and sought, that had been his obsession.

I used the telephone then to try to make connections with Sheriff Davis of Oleana County. There was no Sheriff Davis, I

was informed. There was not even an Oleana County.

Immediately I left the motel and drove along sun-washed highways back to the orange grove where I had unearthed Sissy Bosner's remains. A heavy, guilty regret settled over me. My classified ad in the newspaper had set turning old and inexorable wheels.

I stood amid the wind-rustled orange trees with a lump in my throat. The hole had been re-filled, the loose earth neatly leveled.

There was no statute of limitations on murder, but "Sheriff" Eddie Pepp was no longer worried. It must have been Carvell who had buried Sissy Bosner alive, then for some reason, probably unexpected sudden pressure from the law, had been forced to flee abruptly from the state, and was the only one who knew her whereabouts. Pepp was to have handled things in Florida, including the collection of the ransom and release of Sissy Bosner. Both Pepp and Carvell were wanted in several states, so the Saint Louis address had been a mail drop, a forwarding service, so they couldn't be traced through the mails. Through it, Pepp was supposed to learn where Sissy Bosner was concealed.

But Pepp, waiting in Florida

while Sissy Bosner waited underground for endless days and nights with only so much food, water, and sanity, never learned where Sissy was hidden. Because Blackie Carvell, apparently the lodger and secret lover of Beatrice Logan in the house I would later buy, had been killed in Jade Point by federal agents before he mailed Pepp the map and letter. The old-timers at the Drop-In Tavern in Jade Point had been reticent with me, a newcomer in town, because they wanted to protect the reputation of the recently deceased Logan woman.

Owen Bosner's maniacal determination to find his daughter had received a great deal of publicity, and he had the vast resources to indulge in such a search. Pepp, who never before had killed, could only protect himself from a murder charge by staying in Florida and observing Bosner, and moving in whatever fast and deadly fashion was necessary to reclaim and better conceal Sissy Bosner's body if ever it was located. It was easy to imagine any man in such circumstances becoming paranoid.

So through the years Pepp must have watched the reclusive and obsessive Owen Bosner ever more warily, as the part of central Florida where he

knew the body must be became heavily developed with industry, highways, and tourist attractions, increasing daily the chances that someone would uncover Sissy Bosner's remains and thus prove that she had been kidnapped and murdered in Florida and never seen in Chicago.

Owen Bosner's obsession had created and nourished Eddie Pepp's. The two men were bound together in a pattern of apprehension. And as each of them aged, their obsessions became the mainsprings of their otherwise empty lives, the very purposes of those lives. All of the passing years had strengthened rather than diminished this strange adversity that had developed into need. Probably Pepp even had paid off one of Bosner's employees to keep him posted if Bosner interrupted his reclusiveness to travel.

Pepp must have followed Bosner to Saint Louis, then back to Florida even as Bosner

followed me. Then he cleverly passed himself off as a sheriff when Bosner saw him and ran from him. How both men must have doubted and suffered through the years! One from the fear of a murder charge, the other from the guilt of not having paid a long-ago ransom. And both from the slow, insidious cancer of obsession.

But now it was ended. Pepp had reburied the incriminating, pathetic bones where he could be sure they wouldn't be discovered, in their final resting place, this time leaving no map except within the darkening confines of his own fear-wasted mind. And with them he had buried his reason for living.

Even in the blasting sunlight, I shivered sadly as I walked back to my car.

I hoped Eddie Pepp had treated the buried treasure gently. And that now it would be part of an undisturbed past, alive only in faded photographs and yellowed newspapers.

FIVE MEN, FIVE BULLETS

by Hal Ellson

Barefooted, the old woman walked across the desert from the village of Rosario to the city of Montes. She ate and drank nothing along the way and at police headquarters in Montes she asked to see Chief Lopez. The captain at the desk thought she was a beggar and refused her request, but one of his men recognized

her. She was the mother of the sheriff of Rosario, so the captain sent her up to Lopez. The chief heard her out and said he'd take care of the matter. That satisfied the old woman, but she had a request. Her son was not to know of her visit.

"As you wish," Lopez said, and saw her to the door. Back at his desk, he phoned Captain



Illustration by Robert Walters

Meza. "Send Victor up if he's around," he said.

"He's not around," Meza replied.

"Then find him," Lopez snapped and hung up.

A barefooted shoeshine boy found Detective Victor Fiala at the Blue Moon restaurant and told him he was wanted at headquarters. Grunting, he got

off his stool and went out the door. It was very hot and he took his time crossing the plaza.

Captain Meza grinned at him when he entered the office. "Sorry to spoil your siesta, but his majesty wants to see you," he said, "and you'd better hurry."

"In this heat?"

"It'll be hotter still if you

don't. Something's up."

"Something always is," Fiala muttered and left the office, still in no hurry. The heat was bad enough, but now he had to face the steep iron stairway to the balcony. He damned it as he climbed and, breathing hard, knocked on the chief's door. Lopez asked him in, lit a cigarette, told him of the old woman's complaint, and sat back. "So what do you think?" he said.

With no facts on which to form an opinion, Fiala shrugged, and Lopez said, "Then you don't think anything's wrong?"

Again Fiala shrugged. "The sheriff of Rosario assaulted? That's pretty odd. And why didn't he phone us?"

"Perhaps he's not in condition."

"Or too loaded with Indio to make sense."

"He probably was when the assault took place."

"Probably. His mother doesn't want him to know she came here. That's strange."

Lopez agreed and glanced at his watch. "Don't let me rush you, but . . ."

Fiala went to the door and looked back, and Lopez grinned. "So nothing ever happens in Rosario?" he said.

"Nothing that can't be straightened out."

"Then make sure you

straighten it out."

Outside headquarters, Fiala climbed into his car and drove off. It was twenty-five miles to Rosario, and twenty-five back across the burning desert. He didn't feel up to it and cursed Lopez.

Five minutes later, on the main highway out of the city, he passed an ox-drawn cart. A grizzled farmer sat up front, with Señora Munoz beside him. Fiala braked and waited till the cart came abreast of him, then greeted the old woman and asked if she wanted a faster ride home.

Nodding, she spoke to the driver and he halted the oxen, helped her down from the cart and into the car. As he drove away, Fiala questioned the old woman. She didn't know much, but her son had been hurt. "Badly?" he said.

"Yes."

"Is he able to talk?"

"If he wants to, he can."

"Did he tell you what happened?"

"He told me to mind my own business."

"I see. Was there trouble in the village?"

"No."

Fiala let out his breath. The old woman wasn't helping, but

this didn't surprise him. With the others in the village, it would be the same. He gave up on the old woman, and not another word passed between them till they reached Rosario.

Adobe houses all of a kind stood silent in the sun. He circled the empty, burning plaza, and no one appeared. The village seemed abandoned. He stopped in front of a crumbling adobe, helped the old woman from the car, and led her to the open door. "Señora." He gestured with his hand and she preceded him through the door.

Inside, it was shadowed and cool, a single large room with high bare walls, some sticks of furniture, and no bed. A pallet lay on the floor. Munoz was stretched upon it. A giant of a man, he weighed three hundred pounds, too much of him fat from his unending drinking. He favored dark Indio, but anything flavored with alcohol suited his taste.

"Are you all right?" Fiala asked him.

"Why shouldn't I be. There's nothing wrong with me."

"That's not what I heard."

"Ai, my mother had to call you."

"No, I was passing through and stopped for a drink at Rod-

riguez'. You weren't in, your usual chair, so . . ."

"Rodriguez told you?"

"A customer said you were hurt. What happened?"

"Nothing."

Fiala stooped down. Bruises and swellings disfigured Munoz' face, and a deep gash had displaced one eyebrow. He drew back the blanket covering the big man and shook his head. "Who was responsible for this?" he asked.

"Don't worry about it. I'm all right."

"Sure you are, but you look like you went through a meat grinder."

"Do you think I'd fit?"

"You're recovering fast," Fiala chuckled.

"Yes." Munoz turned to the old woman and asked her to bring him a bottle of Indio. She opened one and gave it to him. In two swigs he emptied it and put it aside.

"Now perhaps you'll tell me what happened," Fiala said.

The big man shrugged. "There's nothing to tell. The lights went out too fast."

"You were hit from behind?"

"Yes, señor."

"Why?"

"How should I know? It just happened."

Not in Rosario, and nowhere else, in fact, did things just hap-

pen without cause. "When the attack took place, where were you?" Fiala asked.

"Just outside my door."

"What time was it?"

"About midnight."

"You were coming from Rodriguez' cantina?"

"And from where else?" Munoz grinned.

"You closed it for the night, of course."

"I always do."

"Who else was there?"

"When I left? Just Rodriguez."

"And earlier?"

"If you think I had any trouble in the cantina, you're wrong."

"I didn't say you did. Who else was there?"

"Rene Calas, Julio Ocampo, and a few others."

"No outsiders?"

"Who stops at Rosario?"

"Some people do."

"I saw no one who didn't belong to the village." Munoz shrugged. "You're wasting your time. What happened, happened."

"It might happen again if nothing is done about it."

"I don't think so," Munoz answered and motioned to the old woman. She brought him another Indio. He finished it in two swigs.

Fiala was at the door. "Take

care of yourself," he said, and stepped outside.

Nothing had changed, the plaza was still desolate and sun scorched, with only a few salt cedars shading the ancient benches where it was too hot to sit. He lit a cigarette and started a slow walk around the plaza. Talking to Munoz had gotten him nowhere, but he was sure no outsider was involved in the matter. Still, it wasn't likely that one of the villagers had assaulted Munoz. Two might have tried, though that was doubtful, he decided, and paused.

His shadow lay before him, heat waves danced ahead, the salt cedars stood motionless, and the adobes squaring the plaza were as silent as empty tombs, but he knew he was being watched from the shadows behind the barred windows. A cat walked out of a yawning doorway, gazed at him, and turning tail on the sun, went back into the house.

The proper place to go, he thought, wiping the sweat from his brow and continuing his walk. It ended at the swinging doors of Rosario's only cantina. He pushed his way in, and Rodriguez greeted him from behind the bar. In a back room, four

younger men were playing pool.

"Something to drink?" said Rodriguez. There was a note of doubt in his voice.

"Carta Blanca."

Rodriguez opened a bottle and placed it on the bar. "You're far from home, señor."

Nodding, Fiala tasted the beer while his eyes wandered to a broken slate in back of the bar where in chalk the names of patrons were listed along with the number of drinks they'd had and owed to the house. As always, Munoz' name topped the list.

"You're heading back to Montes?" Rodriguez asked.

Fiala tasted his beer again and shook his head. "I just came from there. Did you know Munoz was beaten to a pulp?"

"I heard he had some trouble."

"He was here last night."

"He's always here, but there was no trouble."

"Was he drunk?"

"Is he ever sober?"

Fiala smiled. "I doubt it, but did he know what he was doing?"

"He left here on his own two feet."

"At midnight?"

"About that time."

"Who else was here?"

"When he left, no one."

"And earlier?"

Rodriguez thought a mo-

ment. "Rene Calas and Julio Ocampo. Munoz had no trouble with them."

Pool balls clicked in the back room. Fiala turned and watched the one readying his cue stick. There was another sharp click, the ball dropped into a pocket, and his gaze wandered back to the debtors' slate behind the bar and Munoz' name. "Was any outsider in the village yesterday?" he asked Rodriguez.

"Not that I know of, señor."

"Was there any trouble in the village?"

"No, señor."

"Or in here? Sometimes a fellow has one too many on Saturday night and Munoz has to straighten him out."

Rodriguez shook his head. "Everything's been quiet."

Fiala finished his beer and went to the door. "Where do I find Ocampo?" he asked.

"Where else but with his goats."

"And where do I find them?"

"Somewhere near the river probably."

The "river" was a mere thread of muddy water that wound through a gully south of the village. Ocampo was sleeping close by it, his flock foraging on the meagre fare of the surrounding desert. A gaunt hound yapped

and showed its teeth, then backed off with its tail between its legs as Fiala approached, and Ocampo sat up. Old, gray, and thin as a scarecrow, he got to his feet, removed his sombrero, and greeted the detective.

"You were at the cantina last night?" Fiala began.

The old man nodded. There were more questions and more nods, interspersed with shrugs. The old fellow knew very little and had nothing relevant to say. Having expected that, Fiala gave up and drove back to the village. A small boy was rolling a hoop in the plaza. When the car stopped, he approached it and asked for a centavo. Fiala gave him a peso and asked for the house of Rene Calas. The boy pointed it out, and then ran off with his hoop.

Round and squat as a barrel, Rene Calas was propped against the well behind his house, with his sombrero covering his face. Fiala lifted it and a pair of soft black eyes met his. A drunken grin spread over Calas' face.

Shrugging, Fiala turned away. Drunk, or merely playing drunk, either way, Calas was covering up just as Ocampo had done and both knew what had happened. Probably the whole village knew, but no one was going to talk, Fiala thought,

and he returned to the sheriff's house.

"Back again?" Munoz said. He lifted a bottle of Indio, finished it in a gulp, tossed it aside, and watched it roll across the floor.

"Too much is too much," Fiala remarked.

"That's for me to decide, señor. Now may I inquire why you're here?"

"You know the answer to that."

"Better give up, Victor. It's useless."

"I can't. I've a job to do."

"All right, let's have the questions."

Fiala let out his breath and said, "Did you get involved with a woman?"

"In the village?" Munoz laughed. "That would be stupid of me. When I need a woman, I go to Montes and pay for one."

"I can believe that. At the same time perhaps a little innocent flirtation backfired on you."

"In that case, I'd have gotten a knife or a bullet in the back, not a beating, no?"

"All right, a woman wasn't involved. What, then, was the reason for the beating?"

"The reason doesn't matter."

"If it doesn't, then what does?"

"You'll learn about that later."

"I prefer to know now."

The big man was silent, then his hand moved under the blanket. "This is what matters," he said, lifting his pistol. "There are five shells in it."

"So, you know who beat you."

"I've a pretty good idea."

"Use that pistol and you may get yourself killed. Kill someone else and you'll be put away for life."

"It doesn't matter, as long as I get back at them."

"You're drunk and talking crazy. Let me have the gun."

"No, and don't try to take it. There might be an accident."

In the state Munoz was in, an accident was more than possible and Fiala drew back. "You're headed for trouble. Don't be a fool," he said at the door.

"Go back to Montes," Munoz answered. "This is my affair."

"It may also be your funeral," Fiala flung back and stepped outside. Or someone's funeral, he thought. Drunk, Munoz was capable of anything, and he knew his assailants. That was obvious now. There were five of them, and he had a bullet for each.

Blood will be spilled, he thought, crossing the plaza. It was still empty and silent, but now the dusty whiteness was tinted red by the violence of the setting sun. The benches seemed

to be smoldering, the salt cedars flaming. Five bullets for five men, he thought, stepping into the cantina.

The pool players had gone. There were only shadows in the back room now. Rodriguez got up from a table, went behind the bar, and opened a bottle of Carta Blanca. "A long hot day," he remarked.

Fiala nodded. There was grit on his tongue and dust on his lips. Slowly he emptied the bottle Rodriguez had opened. Rodriguez set up another bottle without being asked and said, "What happened, Victor?"

"Nothing of consequence."

"As I thought. Are you going back to Montes?"

"A good idea, but I can't."

"You're only wasting your time here."

Fiala shrugged, picked up the second bottle, and eyed the slate behind the bar as he drank. Six chalk marks were scored against Ocampo for the money he owed for drinks. Calas' total was fourteen, Sotomayer's three, while Munoz topped the list with seventy.

He put down the bottle, and went to the back room. A cue stick lay on the billiard table. He picked it up, took it back to the bar, and said, "Do you mind, I'd like to borrow the stick."

"As you wish," said Rodri-

gues, and Fiala went out the door.

The room where Munoz lay was darker now. Crossed by the shadows of upright bars, a square of faded red tinted the wall beyond the window. In a niche, a candle flickered, bronzing the dark complexion of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Kneeling on the floor, Munoz' mother fingered her rosary and prayed in a whisper. For a moment Fiala stood at the door, then quietly crossed the room and stooped beside Munoz. An empty bottle of mescal lay beside him. Carefully Fiala drew back the blanket. In spite of the shadows, the welts on the man's body were plainly visible. There were many, but one was enough to confirm his suspicion. He replaced the blanket and left.

The sun had set, and shadows were leaping across the plaza. It was still silent and empty when he stepped into the cantina. Rodriguez was lighting the oil lamp behind the bar. The four men who'd been there earlier were in the back room. An ivory ball collided with another on the green felt. A soft click announced the meeting, and the cue ball stopped at the point of engagement while the other rolled to a pocket, held at the

edge, then dropped in.

"So you're back," Rodriguez said.

"I am, and so are your brothers," Fiala answered, hooking a thumb toward the back room. "All four of them."

"They stick together."

"I'm sure they do."

"Is there anything wrong in that?"

"Four brothers and yourself."

Fiala held up his left hand and spread his fingers. "That makes five of you." He slammed the cue stick against the bar, and the four brothers came from the back room.

"What's the trouble?" one asked.

Pointing at each brother in turn, Fiala accused them of assaulting Munoz.

"You're crazy," Rodriguez said. "We had no reason to beat him."

"No reason?" Fiala pointed to the slate behind the bar where Munoz' debt was chalked. "He wouldn't pay for the seventy bottles, so last night in the back room where no one would hear anything, you beat him with pool sticks. How do I know? The marks on his body match this stick in my hand."

Stunned, the brothers stared at each other. Finally Rodriguez admitted that he and his brothers had beaten Munoz.

"But it wasn't planned," he said. "I asked him to pay up and he refused, so I told him to forget the money and leave and not come back. Instead of leaving, he demanded another bottle and pulled his gun. My brothers took it away from him and . . ."

Rodriguez shrugged. "He paid his debt and it's over. He won't come back here."

"That's what you think. He's drunk and liable to do anything."

"Well, let him come then. This time I'll put his gun down his throat," Rodriguez said, and the swinging doors flew open. Munoz staggered in and lifted his gun. A bullet from Fiala's shattered the lamp behind the bar, and Munoz began to fire.

Five shots rang out in the dark. Silence followed. Fiala placed him, lifted the cue stick from the bar, and brought it down on the big man's head. He hit the floor with a thud. After

a few moments Rodriguez lit a candle, and his four brothers arose from the floor. No one had been hit by the wild shots, but Munoz' head was bleeding. Rodriguez brought a rag and bound his head, and Fiala handcuffed him.

"All right, put him in my car," he ordered.

The five brothers lugged him out and tumbled him into the back seat.

Midway to the city, Munoz came to. "What happened?" he groaned. "Did I kill anyone?"

"Luckily you didn't," Fiala answered.


"I'm glad for that, but what are these handcuffs for, and where are you taking me?"

"To the lockup at headquarters. In the morning, if you're fit and think you can behave yourself, you can go back to Rosario. But no more drinking at Rodriguez'."

FICTION

THE BODY IN THE TREE

by
Alan Bletzoe



"You found a what?"
"A dead body. Hanging on a tree." Ralph spit his words out, wrung his hands as he always did, and rapidly shifted his weight from foot to foot like a small child who needed to go to the bathroom.

"Has he got a rope around his neck?" Sheriff Paul Lindsey glowed when he asked the

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question. The kind of glow you have when you're sharing a fantasy with a child.

"No, sir. He ain't got no neck."

"Well, what's holding his head on, Ralph?"

"He ain't got no head, either. It's gone."

"If he's got no head, how is he hanging on the tree? With his hands? Or are his hands missing, too?"

"No, sir, he's got his hands, but his fingers are gone."

Paul smiled, picked up the papers on his desk, straightened them, and moved to the filing cabinet. "Tell me, Ralph, if he's got no head and he's got no fingers, how is he hanging on a tree?"

"I don't know. It's like he's stuck to it, like this." Ralph backed flat up against the wall, then let his head and shoulders droop forward.

Paul slid the cabinet drawer closed and looked at the comical figure against his office wall. "What a character," he thought. "If all little towns have one idiot, Liptal has a classic."

"Tell you what, Ralph, why don't you go back out there and get him down and bring him in."

"I tried to, sheriff," replied Ralph, without moving from his position. "But I couldn't reach him."

"What do you mean you couldn't reach him?"

"He was too far up the tree."

"Okay, Ralph, I'll bite. How far up the tree was he?"

Ralph stepped away from the wall. "I stood next to the tree and jumped as high as I could," Ralph paused in his response, squatted, and then jumped straight up as if trying to reach the ten foot ceiling in the old building, "but I couldn't even reach his feet."

"Come on now, Ralph, tell the truth, aren't you just trying to get another ride in the police car?"

"That'd be nice, sheriff, but it's the truth . . . honest."

"Tell you what, Ralph, we're kinda busy this morning so why don't you come back this afternoon and maybe one of us can give you a ride then."

"I ain't funnin' ya, sheriff, there really is a dead man out there on that tree."

"Come back this afternoon, Ralph." There was a finality in Paul's voice.

A worried look came over Ralph's face. He kind of shrunk like

all the air had gone out of him as he turned toward the door. After a few slow, short steps, he spun around to the sheriff. "You don't even have to give me a ride in the police car. I'll ride out there on my bicycle and you can follow me."

The statement stunned Paul. This was a new one from Ralph. Over the years Ralph had come up with all kinds of stories in order to get a ride in one of the patrol cars. Some of them had even been believable. But he had never pulled this one before.

"Sit down, Ralph." Paul walked out of the office to the front desk. "Billy?"

"Sir?"

Billy Tom Jackson was brand new on the Liptal, Texas, law enforcement branch and Paul was very happy to get him. The entire staff of the little town's police force consisted of three, make that four, people. The sheriff, two deputies, and Ella Mae Hadnot who answered the phone, worked the radio during the day, and did the minimal typing tasks required of the police force. One of the deputies had left almost nine months ago for a higher paying police job in Beaumont and there had been four applications to fill the job. Three had come right away but two of the applicants had police records so were not eligible. The third had been Ralph. When Billy applied, Paul hired him quick.

"The fellow in my office is Ralph Skinner. He's the town idiot. At least once a month he comes in here with some sort of story, trying to get a ride in one of the patrol cars."

"I bet he always asks to turn on the lights and run the siren," grinned Billy.

"That's right."

"What's the supposed crime?"

"He's found another dead body."

"Another dead body?"

"That's one of his favorite stories. He'll come in and say that he's found a corpse out in the woods somewhere so if we have the time we'll drive him out. We, of course, never find a body. He'll say that the wild animals must have gotten it or that it came back to life and walked off. One time he said a flying saucer had landed and stolen the victim."

Billy laughed. "So you want me to give Ralph a ride."

"Not exactly. Ralph knows every street, highway, road, and trail within fifty miles of here." Paul walked to the large map on the wall. "If he rode with you a month, you'd know this county as good

as anybody."

"You want me to carry him with me for a month?"

"No. I was just thinking out loud," replied Paul, turning from the map. "His story is a little different this time."

"How different?"

"He says he doesn't want to ride in the car. Said he'd ride his bike and we could follow."

The smile disappeared from Billy's face. "What do you think?"

"I think he's got something up his sleeve and he's gonna pull something that will get him in the patrol car."

Some of the smile came back on Billy's face.

"What we're gonna do is call him in here and find out where the crime is this time. I'll point it out on the map. We'll let him get a head start on his bike, then you can sort of meet him out at the spot. It'll be a good way for you to become familiar with some of the old logging roads around here. I'd go with you but I have a budget meeting with the mayor. Anyway, if he concocts a way to get in the car, it's no big thing."

"Sounds good to me."

Paul walked to the door of his office. "Ralph?"

Ralph appeared almost instantly. "Yes, sir?"

"Where is the body this time?"

"Beside a Johnson off the Morgan Ferry road."

Billy walked around his desk toward the map. "What's a Johnson?"

"I'll show you." Paul joined Billy at the map. "There are four major logging companies around here. Wallace, Markin, Sheffield, and Johnson. Whenever they start cutting in an area, they have to cut roads into the woods to get the trucks in to haul out the logs. There have been hundreds of those roads cut over the years. Most of them disappear back into the growth but some of them stay alive and in some sort of use. Since there are so many of them and it's impossible to name them, they take on the name of whoever cuts them."

"So whenever I hear of a Johnson or a Wallace or a whatever, it could be any number of roads."

"Exactly. But they are always connected to a road with a name, like this one." Paul pointed to a location on the map. "The Morgan Ferry road goes off Highway 69 about ten miles north of town. It used to be the way to get to the Plumbtree community. Most of the Johnsons are about eight miles farther along this road. You pass

some Markins and some Sheffields before you get there." Paul turned from the map to face Ralph. "You hop on your bike and head on out there. When you get to the Johnson, wait there until Deputy Jackson gets there, you hear?"

"Yes, sir," answered Ralph and was out the door before another word could be spoken.

"Sheriff," said Billy, "it's almost twenty miles out there. Don't you think it would be easier if I just carried him?"

"Probably, but old Mrs. Hickam called this morning and said somebody has been stealing her chickens. Likely it's a neighbor's dog or maybe a wolf. Whatever, I want you to drive out there and look around a bit. It'll make her feel better."

"Does she live on a Johnson, too?"

"No," Paul laughed, "she's on FM 1108 four miles off State 119. It's easy to find. Hers is the third house on the left. She'll have a green '65 Chevy pickup in front. From there you can ease on over to Morgan Ferry road and look for Ralph."

"Altogether, it shouldn't take more than an hour. Isn't that a little quick to meet a fellow twenty miles out on a bicycle?" asked Billy, strapping on his gun belt.

"Oh, he'll be there. Ralph may not be very bright, but he sure can ride a bike."

"Come on, sheriff, eighteen miles on a bicycle on dirt roads in an hour? You must be kidding."

"You'll see. You'll be back before lunch."

"If you say so. But if he does beat me there, he must be one pedaling fool," said Billy, starting out the door.

"He is."

It was after two o'clock when Paul got out of the mayor's office. He had a headache and acid indigestion. The headache was from the politicking and the indigestion was from the greasy hamburgers that had been brought in for lunch from Martha's Quick Stop Diner. He hated those monthly meetings. Everybody knew the outcome before they started, but they always had them. It was a little town's effort to seem like a big town.

"Any messages?"

Ella Mae didn't even look up from her crossword puzzle. "Nope."

"Where's Billy?"

"Beats me."

"When did he get back from his run out with Ralph?"

"He didn't."

Paul walked out of his office so he could see Ella Mae. "Have you heard from him?"

"Nope."

Paul felt a quickening of his heart. "See if you can raise him on the radio, will you?"

Ella Mae looked up from her puzzle to glare at Paul.

"Please."

She hated being disturbed. Whenever Paul needed something done, he had to debate what was easier, asking her or doing it himself. Most of the time he did it himself.

He walked back into his office and sat down in his chair. Leaning back, he started massaging his temples, seeking some relief. He listened to Ella trying to reach Billy.

"Unit Two, this is Base. Come in."

There was a long pause with no response.

"Unit Two, this is Base. Come in."

Again nothing.

"Billy, the sheriff wants you. Answer me."

Still nothing.

Paul called to Ella from his chair. "Give Mrs. Hickam a call and see if he showed up out there and if so, what time did he leave."

The only response he received was the sound of Ella Mae slamming down her crossword puzzle book to show her displeasure. He leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, tuned out everything he could, and resumed massaging his temples. Gradually the pain started to ease.

"No answer," Ella called from the other room, bringing Paul back from his repose.

He sat there blankly, not knowing what to think. This was unusual and nothing unusual ever happened in Liptal.

Ella Mae appeared at Paul's office door. Another unusual happening. The only time Ella Mae got out of her chair during the day was to leave.

"Where do you think he is?" she asked.

Paul wasn't sure what he saw on Ella's face. Was it concern or curiosity? Whatever it was, any change of expression on Ella Mae's face was unusual.

That made four unusualls in one day.

"Guess I better take a ride out to Mrs. Hickam's house and see what I can see."

"Guess you better," said Ella.

"Keep trying to get Billy on the radio and let me know when you reach him."

When he was halfway down the steps of the jailhouse, Ella called to him. "Sheriff?"

He stopped and looked up at her, squinting through the warm bright sunlight.

"Don't forget to turn on your radio."

He smiled and waved a reply. He had been known to go for days without turning on his radio. Maybe Billy had done the same thing.

Mrs. Hickam's old pickup was sitting halfway around the unpaved, sandy, horseshoe-shaped driveway in front of her house. The place looked very quiet and peaceful surrounded by the towering pines and huge oak trees. Paul knocked at the front door and called her name. When he received no answer, he walked around the side of the house toward the barn. There were several Dominique hens running loose in the yard. An old dog was sleeping in a sunny sand pile near the barn. He didn't even acknowledge Paul's presence.

"Mrs. Hickam," he called through the open back door. "It's Sheriff Lindsey."

The only response was the grunt of a pig from beside the barn. Paul walked through the barn, around it to the stable, and back to the front of the house without finding anybody. Looking at the tire tracks in the driveway, he recognized the pattern used on the patrol car. The tracks were fresh and undisturbed. Billy had been there.

"Base, this Unit One. Do you read me?"

"Read you fine. Did you find Mrs. Hickam, sheriff?"

"If she's here, I can't find her. Have you heard from Billy?"

"Not a word."

"I'm gonna take a ride over to Morgan Ferry road and see if I can find him or Ralph. Get on the phone and call around out here to Mrs. Hickam's neighbors and see if they know where she is."

"Okay, sheriff, I'll see what I can do. Over and out."

It took Paul forty minutes to reach the first of the Johnsons along Morgan Ferry. Driving slowly, it was five more minutes before he spotted Ralph sitting beside the road. He stood up when Paul pulled to a stop.

"Hey, Ralph."

"Hey, sheriff," replied Ralph, avoiding Paul's eyes.

"Have you seen Billy?"

Ralph was nervous and upset about something. "No, sir. I been waiting right here."

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Yes, sir. I got to be going now." Ralph turned, picked up his bike, and pushed it toward the road and town.

Paul had stepped out of his car to stop him when he heard the whirling, chopping sound of Dr. Windel's helicopter approaching overhead. The sound froze him and Ralph in their tracks. Tilting their heads backwards they watched as it passed above them, flying pretty low.

"Come back here, Ralph," the sheriff said after the noise had subsided enough for Ralph to hear. Ralph walked slowly back to the car as Paul slid under the wheel and reached for the radio. Quickly he turned the frequency selector to where the helicopter's radio should be. "Dr. Windel's helicopter, this is Sheriff Lindsey. Do you read?"

The answer came in seconds. "Hello, Paul. What's up?"

"Doc, I seem to be missing a patrol car. Have you seen it?"

"I sure have. That's the reason I buzzed you. What in the world is a patrol car doing in a cornfield?"

"Beats the devil out of me. Where is the cornfield?" Paul could hear the copter noise in the distance. It seemed constant, as if the doctor were circling to come back.

"About a quarter of a mile south of you. Keep an eye on me and I'll lead you down the right road to get to it."

Ralph was standing beside the car listening to the conversation. When Paul looked at him he could see tears in his eyes.

"I'll show you, sheriff," he said and quick as a flash was on his bike and headed down the Johnson.

Paul dropped the microphone in the seat, started the car, and gunned it down the dirt road after Ralph. Just as he was catching up to the cyclist, Ralph turned left on another, less traveled road. Paul slowed and turned in pursuit.

The road was less than a hundred feet long and opened into the cornfield. He stopped at the opening and could see where a path had been pushed through the head-high corn. Easing the car forward, he followed Ralph, bouncing over the rows of fallen stalks. Gradually veering left in a slow circle, the path suddenly revealed the lost patrol car, corn standing on each side of it and a big oak tree directly in front.

Pulling up behind the wrecked car and a droop-headed Ralph, Paul picked up the microphone from the seat. "I found the car, doc. How about hanging around a bit in case I need some help?"

"All right, Paul," came the answer over the speaker.

Paul got out of the car and walked past Ralph to the side of the wrecked car. Sitting in the back seat with his hands cuffed behind him was Billy.

"Would you open the door so I can get out of here," he shouted through the closed window.

Paul opened the door. "Billy," he began, "the reason we put wire mesh across the back of the front seat and don't have handles on the back doors is so we can haul prisoners. What are you doing back here?"

"I would tell you but you wouldn't believe it. The key to these cuffs is in my shirt pocket. Would you be so kind?"

"Not until you tell me."

"Let me put it like this. Don't ever ask me to give Ralph a ride in the patrol car again."

"Do you mean to say that Ralph cuffed you and put you back there?"

"Well, sorta." Billy leaned against the fender of the car. "I was trying to be nice to the guy. Answering his questions. Showing him how things work in the car."

"Like handcuffs."

"Yeah, like handcuffs."

"How did he get you in the back seat?"

"Come on, sheriff. Unlock the cuffs, will you?"

"One more question. Where is Mrs. Hickam?"

"I don't know. Have you lost her?"

Paul stared at him and Billy said hastily, "When I left her, she was getting ready to go to town. You might find her there, whatever you want her for."

The more Paul thought about it, the funnier the whole thing became. As he reached for the key, he started to chuckle. By the time he had one of the cuffs unlocked he was laughing outright.

Ralph heard the laughter and came around the car to join in. With both Paul and Ralph laughing, Billy started to bluster.

"You better stop your laughing, boy, 'cause you're in serious trouble."

The statement came like a slap in the face to Ralph.

"He's right, Ralph," said Paul, letting his laughter die down.

"I'm afraid that this time your story-telling has caused some serious problems. Who do you think is going to pay for the damage you did to this patrol car?"

Before Ralph could answer, Dr. Windel's voice blared from the sheriff's radio. "Are you going to need any more help, Paul?"

Paul walked to his car's window, leaned in, and retrieved the microphone. "No, doc, thanks. We've got everything under control. Sure appreciate your help, though."

"Any time, sheriff. See you later."

Paul leaned back in the car and switched the radio to the police frequency. "Base, this is Unit One. Come in."

"Go ahead, sheriff," answered Ella Mae.

"Give Wooly a call and tell him to bring his wrecker out to Harvey Richey's cornfield. We found Billy, and the patrol car is wrecked."

"Anybody hurt? Should I get an ambulance?"

"Not unless you can find one that can haul hurt pride."

"What?"

"Never mind, Ella Mae. Just send the wrecker. Over and out."

Paul dropped the mike on the seat and turned to Ralph. "You go on home now and tell your pa what you've done. I'll be by later to talk to you both."

"Yes, sir," said Ralph and picked up his bike and slowly made his way out of the cornfield.

Billy walked to the sheriff's side. "Should you let him go like that?"

"He's harmless. He'll go home." Paul smiled at Billy.

"Well, I've learned one thing."

"What's that?"

"Never believe Ralph, or trust him. Just give him a ride once in a while and he'll be fine."

Chuckling again, Paul patted Billy on the back.

Harvey Richey was waiting for Paul when they arrived at the jailhouse. He stood up when they walked in the door.

Paul was the first to speak.

"Now, Harvey, don't worry about your cornfield. I'm sure something can be worked out so that you don't lose nothing on the damaged crops."

"I ain't worried about the corn, sheriff," said Harvey, turning his hat in his hands nervously. "There's something else I want to talk to you about."

"What's that, Harvey?"

"Over in the woods next to that cornfield?"

"Yeah."

"There's a dead body hanging on a tree."

Paul felt the quickening in his heart again.

"Do you know who it is, Harvey?"

"Nope. He ain't got no head."

Billy and Paul exchanged glances. Paul's heart beat even faster.

"You lead us out to the spot. We'll follow in my car," said Paul, reaching for his hat.

Harvey started out the door. Paul looked at Billy.

"If what Harvey says is true, you know what's really bad about it?" Billy said.

"What's that?"

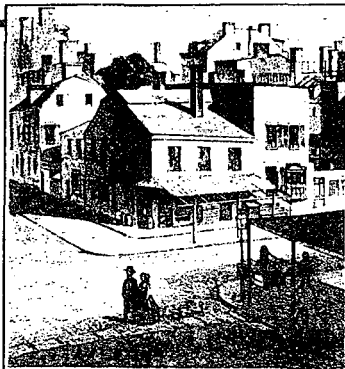
"The next time Ralph comes in with a story, we're going to have to go with him."



CASES ON FILE

Have You Seen Elma Sands?

by Vincent James



A young, vivacious girl like Gulielma Elmore Sands, Elma to her friends, would have loved to have been a spectator at the grand procession solemnly making its way up Broadway from the Battery, marking the last day of the eighteenth century. At the same time it was paying homage to the memory of the recently deceased George Washington. But while Alexander Hamilton, resplendent in the uniform of Commanding General of the Army, was guiding his spirited charger at the head of the parade, farther uptown past Ca-

nal Street, in the lonely, windswept Lispenard Meadows, the thin December sunlight—struggling through chinks in the heavy planking that covered the unused Manhattan Well—picked out an undulating white blob that was Elma Sands's face, dimly visible through the crust of thin ice covering the dark water.

Three years before, Elma had travelled from her home in New-Cornwall, where she lived with her mother, to visit her Quaker cousins Catherine and Elias Ring at their boarding house on Greenwich and Pro-

Above, the Rings' boarding house as it looked in 1861. Though many years had passed since Elma Sands lived there, it is said to be almost unaltered. It was razed in 1905.

vost (now Franklin) Streets in New York City.

The city at the time was a dynamic, growing young giant. The population had soared over the fifty thousand mark. Commerce was booming. The harbor was studded with the masts of ships bringing tea, silks, spices, rum, brandies, wines, and other exotic cargoes to its bulging markets.

Fashionable carriages, or sleighs in season, darted up and down Broadway, and well fed strollers displayed their finery on the Battery promenade. The Park Theatre had opened the year before, attracting world renowned figures to perform on its boards. There was an atmosphere of vibrancy, vitality in the very air.

Elma was caught up in the fascinating world around her. She stayed on permanently at the Rings'. All accounts describe her as a very pretty girl in her early twenties, smiling and pleasant and "very lively, open and free."

Two other boarders of importance to us at the house on Greenwich Street were Levi Weeks, who arrived about the beginning of July, 1799, and Miss Margaret Clark, who attracted Mr. Weeks's attention until she left for a stay in the country in August; he then switched his interest to Elma Sands.

A room on the second floor was occupied by an Englishman with the vaguely disquieting name of Richard David Croucher; as we shall see, he exhibited a remarkable interest in other people's affairs. Hope Sands, Mrs. Ring's sister, also lived in the house, along with a few others.

Levi's tentative advances in Elma Sands's direction received little encouragement until almost the end of summer when Mrs. Ring, nervous about reports of yellow fever in the city, fled to a friend in the suburbs, now Greenwich Village.

By the time Mrs. Ring returned in response to a plaintive message from her husband that "he was lonely," it was obvious that Levi Weeks—an "architect" who worked for his well-to-do brother Ezra, a contractor—had made great strides in his pursuit of Elma Sands and that a front-burner romance was going on.

Mrs. Ring was uneasy about Mr. Weeks's intentions, but she said nothing. The only ones who were blissfully unaware that their secret was no longer a secret were the two young people. The ubiquitous Mr. Croucher, whose room was directly opposite Elma's, moved his bed to the middle of the room, so that by leaving his door open a crack he could observe all that went on in the hall outside. Even

Hope Sands had taken to listening outside Elma's door.

Things went on more or less routinely in the Rings' menage into the dark days of December when the lamplighters made their rounds earlier and sleighs glided over the whitened roadways. There were other events to take people's minds off their own problems: George Washington passed away on December 14th and a French army officer named Napoleon Bonaparte was making waves on the Continent. There was also restrained excitement at the celebrations planned for the impending turn of the century.

Everyone at the breakfast table on Sunday, December 22nd, a day that began so uneventfully at the Rings' boarding house, was struck by Elma's "unusually cheerful and serene" mood, but only three persons in the house were as yet aware of the cause of her happiness. Later Hope Sands drew Mrs. Ring aside and, swearing her to secrecy, revealed that Elma had told her Levi and she were to be married that evening. The mistress of the house was both relieved and pleased. She was genuinely fond of her young, artless cousin. She promised to say nothing, but about midday Elma also confided in her.

Just before candlelight that evening, when Elma came

downstairs, everyone remarked how prettily she was dressed. She said she was going next door to borrow a muff from Elizabeth Osborn, hoping it would add an extra little touch of elegance to her outfit.

When Levi came in, it was getting dark outside, and although Elma had returned and had put the borrowed muff up in her room, he did not stay in the house long enough to take tea.

After the supper things were cleared away, the Rings, Elma, and two of the male boarders settled themselves in the sitting room where a cheery fire was burning. Hope Sands had gone to an evening Quaker meeting, and Miss Clark was visiting in the neighborhood.

Elma, understandably a bit fidgety, broke the spell by going out into the entry and, leaning on the half door, peered out into the street. It was completely dark by then but the sparse street lamps and the moonlight made the frozen, whitened roadway clearly visible. At Mrs. Ring's warning that she would take cold, Elma closed the top of the half door and went back into the parlor. She was plainly waiting, but a short time later she brightened when she heard the front door open and Levi came in and sat down.

Mrs. Ring went out into the hallway, probably to check that both inner and outer doors were

shut tight, as the night was getting colder. While she stood there, the two male boarders went up to their rooms and she heard the clock strike eight. When she re-entered the sitting room, Elma and Levi were in opposite chairs, and she saw Levi make a sign with his eyes as though he was suggesting it was time to go. Elma immediately arose and went upstairs. Mrs. Ring, because she felt a vague uneasiness, followed Elma. The door of the girl's room stood open, and she saw that Elma was fully dressed for the outdoors. She had her hat and shawl on and held the borrowed muff in her gloved hands. She looked rather pale but Mrs. Ring soothed her, telling her not to be frightened, surmising her nervousness was due to her pending marriage. Then the mistress of the house went back downstairs. Only her husband Elias, dozing in his chair, and Levi Weeks were in the sitting room. Levi nervously took his hat and went out into the entry. Soon, from her seat near the door of the sitting room, Mrs. Ring heard a soft step coming down and a moment later muffled whispering at the bottom of the stairs. The front door opened, the latch fell, and there was silence.

Around ten o'clock Mrs. Ring, about to wake Elias and retire for the evening, heard the front

door open, and Levi Weeks walked into the parlor alone. He seemed agitated and uncertain of what to do or say. Suddenly he asked, "Is Hope back from the meeting?" Mrs. Ring answered, "No," staring at him curiously. Then he blurted out, "Has Elma gone to bed?" "No, she has gone out..." Mrs. Ring answered. Avoiding her eyes, he said, "I'm surprised she would go out so late at night and alone." "I've no reason to think she went alone," Mrs. Ring replied. She was extremely upset and wanted to continue the conversation after Elias left the room, but Levi quickly went upstairs on her husband's heels.

Mrs. Ring sat up till midnight, but Elma never returned.

As the days wore on with no news of the missing girl, Mrs. Ring's forebodings deepened and her suspicions of Levi Weeks solidified. She confronted him frequently. At one point she told him that she knew of the intended marriage. He turned pale and cried out, "I'm ruined...unless she appears to clear me..."

On Tuesday, the 24th of December, William Blanck, a thirteen year old boy, was playing on the Lisenard Meadows near the Manhattan Well. The well, one of Aaron Burr's wily enterprises supposedly intended to supply the city with water, had long since been covered and

abandoned.

Noticing a strange looking object lying on the snowy ground not far from the well, William investigated and found a woman's muff. It was identified as the muff Elma had borrowed from Elizabeth Osborn.

On Christmas Day William talked his father into going back with him to the well. They found sleigh tracks within ten feet of it and many prints of men's shoes in the snow.

The news of Gulielma Sands's disappearance had by now spread over the entire town creating "great excitement and interest." People were asking each other, "Have you seen Elma Sands?" Finally, on January 2nd, it dawned on someone, possibly Blanck, Senior, to sound the depths of the Manhattan Well.

Elias Ring, Andrew Blanck, James Lent, a neighbor, and two men known to us only as Watkins and Page, went out to probe the well with hooks and poles. They removed the heavy board cover, and a short time later the remains of Elma Sands lay on a plank on the trampled snow.

Her gown was torn open just above the waist, and her shawl, handkerchief, gloves, and shoes were missing. There were scratches on her right hand and right foot, as if she had been dragged along the ground. Her

comb tied with a white ribbon was still hanging in her disheveled hair. There were other bruises and lacerations on the body.

Shortly after the discovery, Levi Weeks was arrested. When he was made to identify the corpse, one of the first things he said was, "Is it the Manhattan Well she was found in?"

He asked that his brother Ezra provide counsel for him. Affluent Ezra responded by securing Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr, and H. Brockholst Livingston for the defense! Did a similar battery of counselors ever appear again in any American criminal case?

Cadwallader Colden, assistant attorney general, represented the State. The presiding justice was Chief Justice John Lansing, flanked by Richard Varick, mayor of the city, and Recorder Richard Harrison.

The trial began Monday, March 31st, and lasted two days. Because of the throng that sought to attend, the trial had to be held in the largest room in the old City Hall at Wall and Nassau Streets. Before it concluded, seventy-five witnesses had trooped to the stand.

The prosecution dwelt mainly on the intimacy allegedly existing between the prisoner and Elma Sands, an example of which is the testimony of the redoubtable Richard David

Croucher. "I was a lodger but not a boarder in Mr. Ring's house. I remained at the house all the time of Mrs. Ring's absence, and paid particular attention to the behavior of the prisoner and the deceased, and I was satisfied from what I saw, there was a warm courtship going on; I have known the prisoner at the Bar to be with the deceased Elma Sands in private frequently and at all times of the night. I knew him to pass two whole nights in her bedroom. Once lying in my bed which stood in the middle of the room; and in a posture which was favorable to see who passed the door, and which I assumed on purpose...I saw the prisoner ...come out of her room and pass the door, in his shirt only, to his own room."

So much for Mr. Croucher. There is a charming fable that when Croucher finished his stint—it was quite late at night and the flickering candles in the dusky courtroom had been lit—Burr seized a candelabrum from the counsel table, thrust it into Croucher's face, and cried, "Gentlemen, behold the murderer!" Unfortunately, the anecdote seems only a bit of folklore.

Levi Weeks did not testify at his trial. The direction of the defense, keyed by brother Ezra, was that Levi had been at Ezra's house discussing business from

about half past eight until nearly ten o'clock the night of the tragedy.

The end result was that Levi Weeks was acquitted of the murder of Gulielma Sands. The evidence against him was judged inconclusive.

No one in the courtroom was more shocked and stunned at this verdict than Mrs. Ring. Pointing a quivering hand in the general direction of Alexander Hamilton, the Quaker lady is said to have uttered this ominous pronouncement: "If thee die a natural death, I shall think there is no justice."

Hamilton died four years later in a duel with Aaron Burr. Judge John Lansing disappeared from the face of the earth some fifteen years later; he had left his hotel to catch a boat for Albany and was never seen again. Burr ended his days a bitter, shunned old man. Even the inquisitive Mr. Croucher finally wound up at the end of a rope in Merrie Olde England.

Who killed Elma Sands? Does her ghost still walk, hungering for justice? As late as 1977, a restaurant owner, an artist, and some others living in the neighborhood of 129 Spring Street, from which juts a littered factory alley whose cobblestones hide a deep well, believe they have seen a misty female figure....Perhaps it was she.

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



NYT Pictures

MARGERY ALLINGHAM

For my own part, there are few finer ways to warm up a chill night or laze through a summer day than by rereading the sleuthing adventures of old favorites. Repeatedly I myself return to the foggy, gaslit streets of London to catch Holmes and Watson slipping into a hansom. Perhaps you prefer the tonier times of Lord Peter's London, or the rooftop orchid garden of Nero Wolfe, or the courtrooms that Perry Mason calls home.

We could argue all day about the merits of our particular favorites, but there's one experience about which we'd all agree: the horrible moment when you came to the last word on the

last page of the last book in the series. Sure, you knew you had hours of pleasure ahead in the rereading, but the tale twice told would always be missing a prime ingredient: the element of surprise. To my mind, if there's any single feature that distinguishes mysteries from novels in general, it is that very thing: suspense . . . shock . . . mystery . . . *surprise!* But how do you find a new writer, out of all those available, who writes the way you like best?

In the interests of surprise, therefore, and of identifying likely new favorites to provide it, each issue I'll be introducing you to a writer whom you may not have met, one whom I feel

is worthy of your attention. Some of these authors have been out of print until just recently; others, like Margery Allingham, simply seem to have fallen through the cracks, especially for newcomers to the joys of mystery reading. And I'm selecting only writers who have written a series, so you can postpone that terrible moment I mentioned above.

The daughter of a journalist, Margery Allingham was born in Essex, England, in 1904. She was in her twenties when she wrote *The Black Dudley Murder* (1929), the first of nearly two dozen classic English mystery novels written mostly in the 1930's and 1940's and featuring the engaging Albert Campion, private detective. Allingham's plots are satisfyingly puzzling, her characters impeccably drawn, her prose first-rate. But it is undoubtedly Campion, his bland blue eyes blinking behind hornrimmed glasses, who deserves much of the credit for the following Margery Allingham has today.

Albert Campion began life as a frequently fatuous and mercurial young man of somewhat unprepossessing but very English public school appearance—tall, thin, blond. His wry sense of humor was reflected in his calling card (beautifully engraved, of course), which read:

"Albert Campion. Coups neatly executed/Nothing sordid, vulgar, or plebeian/Deserving causes preferred/Police no object." He described himself on several occasions as a "universal uncle" or "député adventurer," and there were strong implications that he was a black sheep, the disinherited son of a very prestigious (perhaps even royal?) family, whose real surname was so instantly recognizable that Campion assumed a pseudonym. In those early novels he was called "Bertie," and he lived in the residence he continued to call home throughout the series—a comfortable bachelor flat over a police precinct house—with his valet, a trusty but surly ex-con with the unlikely name of Magersfontein Lugg. Like Dorothy Sayers' creation, Lord Peter Wimsey, Campion seems to reflect an exuberance that was the watermark of that era. And it's undeniably a lot of fun to hear your shocked detective hero retort, "My hat!" as an expletive, or to witness a grateful Frenchman exclaim, "You are a veritable hero. The—how shall I say?—the pineapple of your race!"

But over the years the books subtly changed. Not only does Campion begin working hand-in-glove with Scotland Yard, but several of the inspectors

become cronies and regulars in the series. There's little further mention of Campion's finances or wealthy background; his investigations appear to be favors for friends, family, and even, on occasion, for the Yard. His flip-pant speech becomes more subdued, as if his author, as she too aged, realized that life—and its inevitable sister, death—was a much more serious business than she had initially recognized. Her writing becomes more sophisticated, more pensive, more compelling, as in the following passage:

"As he walked alone between the yew hedges it occurred to him that in an age when all the deepest emotions can be successfully laughed out of existence by any decently educated person, the sanctity and importance of sudden death was a comforting and solitary thing, a last little rock, as it were, in the shifty sands of one's own standards and desires."

Allingham filled her novels with lots of other goodies besides Campion. Her settings, though always English, vary from a gothic castle (*The Black Dudley Murder*), to a picturesque working mill (*The Fear Sign*), to an insular seacoast village (*Cargo of Eagles*).

There's murder in the country house of a lionized West End performer in *Dancers in Mourning*, and murder in the exclusive townhouse of a friend and marquess in *Pearls Before Swine*. Even when the books are set in London, as many are, the reader is exposed to wildly different parts of that city: a reputable old publishing firm on one occasion (*Flowers for the Judge*), the glittering world of high fashion on another (*Fashion in Shrouds*), the close-knit community of the art world on a third (*Death of a Ghost*).

And what wonderful characters populate these backdrops. There's the indefatigable Charlie Luke from Scotland Yard (who's such a treat to watch in *More Work for the Undertaker*). There's the faithful manservant Lugg, who gets fatter and fatter in each book; and there's Campion's wife Amanda, who first appears as a spunky teenager in *The Fear Sign* (1933) and is reintroduced ten years later to become embroiled in the plot—and then engaged to the detective. It's a colorful parade of unlikely, eccentric, finely-drawn characters: villains and victims, suspects and colleagues, and even—on occasion—heroes and lovers. There are the attractive, the stupid, the plain silly, and even the truly evil, and every novel is

teeming with a rich assortment.

The plots always involve murder and—in many clever and twisty ways—a dash of something else from a mixed bag of treason, envy, blackmail, embezzlement, adultery, revenge. There are conventional murder puzzles, wartime tales involving national security, and even novels that follow the format of today's police procedurals. My personal favorites—and a good beginning for the uninitiated—are *Flowers for the Judge* (1934) as a good example of the young Campion at work; *Traitor's Purse* (1940) for sheer

audacity, for our hero is suffering from amnesia throughout most of his mission—and most of the book; and *The Tiger in the Smoke* (1952), which simply stands heads above ninety-nine percent of all mystery novels ever written.

There are twenty-five Albert Campion adventures, which should keep you out of trouble for a while. So next time you're planning to dip into your much-thumbed Dorothy Sayers or Ngaio Marsh novels, pick up a Margery Allingham instead. To love two of these authors and never even try the third is nothing less than a crime!

MYSTERY REVIEWS

Those of you who like period detail and atmosphere almost better than murder itself might try Raymond Paul's **The Thomas Street Horror**. Set in New York in 1936, the tale is based on firsthand accounts of an actual murder of a beautiful prostitute who was found in her smoldering bed, murdered with an axe. Although one of her young clients was immediately arrested, he was subsequently acquitted, and the murder has remained unsolved to this day. Paul, the author of another historical mystery titled *Who Killed Mary Rogers?*, has added the fictional characters of Lon Quincannon—the enigmatic and charismatic lawyer for the defense—and a likable cub reporter for one of the penny presses, who narrates. He's also devised an ingenious solution, one that fits all the facts of the case. (Viking Press, \$13.95, 322 pp.)

Darkness at Pemberly is a long-lost detective story by T. H. White, best known for *The Once and Future King*. In this English novel first published in 1932, White opens with a very respectable variation of the locked-room mystery; he's even set his murder in a university town apparently quite recognizable as Cambridge. But soon the novel twists: the mad murderer confesses, confident there's

no proof; and the shy Inspector Buller, resigning in defeat, unwittingly leads the killer to the home of the woman he loves. There are hair-raising moments, and a perplexing moral question : who is, after all, chasing whom? (Dover Publications, \$3.75, 286 pp.)

Anthony Olcott's **Murder at the Red October**, now in paperback (Bantam Books, \$2.95, 244 pp.), sounds a very different note. At the center of this tensely grim novel of contemporary Russian life is Duvakin, middle-aged, lower-class, saved from hopelessness by his burgeoning affair with a younger woman. But when the corpse of an American is found at the seedy tourist hotel that hires him as a security guard—and he discovers heroin in a set of nested wooden dolls—Duvakin's dull existence swiftly turns into a dizzying round of confrontations which require him to lie brilliantly—or die.

Several sleuths are making return engagements this season. In Lawrence Block's **A Stab in the Dark**, ex-cop Matthew Scudder postpones his guilt-induced drinking bouts for a short time while he searches for the truth to an old crime. It's an intriguing prospect: nine years earlier a young woman was stabbed with an ice pick during a rash of similar crimes, forcing her bereaved father to accept the meaninglessness of his daughter's death. Now a psychopath has been arrested and has confessed—to all but that one murder. (Arbor House, \$10.95, 192 pp.)

Another contemporary shamus is Harry Stoner of Cincinnati, who made his first appearance in *The Lime Pit*. Now, in **Final Notice** by Jonathan Valin, Harry is hired by a public library to catch the person who's been slicing up the nudes in expensive art books. There aren't a lot of surprises plot-wise (although the ending might catch some readers off guard), but there are some charming characters, including a dotty old librarian with a passion for astrology, and Harry's spunky sparring partner who happens to be a liberated lady security guard. (Avon Books, \$2.25, 189 pp.)

Finally, I heartily recommend **The Mystery Reader's Quiz Book** (M. Evans, \$4.95 pap., \$9.95 cloth, 191 pp.). Here are cross-words and clues tucked into "tell-tale" paragraphs, tricky questions and truths heretofore unsuspected (of the "Did you know that . . . ?" variety)—and all wittily presented in a test-yourself format. What mystery fan will be able to resist the combination of trivia and tests? Kudos to editors Aneta Corsaut, Muff Singer, and Robert Wagner; and to Jay Robert Nash, editor of its twin, **The True Crime Quiz Book**. Both offer a lot of entertainment for the money.

FICTION

You Don't Know Very Well



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W Alex

ll by Kenneth Gavrell

"This isn't the sort of apartment I'd expect you to have," Alma said. "What sort would you expect?" I asked her.

"I don't know—dirty dishes in the sink and overflowing ashtrays. This place is neurotically neat."

"I can find things easier that way."

She put her hand up and ruffled my hair. She liked to do that because it annoyed me. Alma has a harmless streak of perversity in her.

"Why don't you make us some

breakfast?" I suggested.

She went to the kitchen, looking lovely in her tight skirt and blouse. Her dark hair was pulled back straight from the temples and braided with a ribbon down her back, almost to the waist.

"Two cups of coffee," I called.

"I know."

In ten minutes she came out with a tray of eggs, toast, and coffee.

"You have to be at the agency by nine?" I asked.

"As usual."

"In that case we'd better eat fast."

Traffic downtown wasn't as bad as it had been for the past two hours, but it was still bad. I got her to her travel agency just after nine.

"Will you call me tonight?" she asked.

"Depends on what's waiting at my office."

"There are some people who work nine to five, you know."

"Not private detectives."

I watched her swing through the door, then turned my Toyota towards the Condado. I had only one near-accident, which is pretty good. There are about half a million drivers between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five in San Juan trying to kill me. They are likely to come at you from any direction except straight overhead. They all have Italian air horns.

"*Buenas*, bright eyes," Maria said as I came in.

"Are they bright? They shouldn't be at this hour."

"Raul wants to know if you'll need him to run any leads today."

"No, I don't think so. Anything important come in?"

"Only one phone call."

"I don't believe it."

She held up a slip of yellow paper. "A man named Frank Centeno. Wants you to call him at this number. Sounds like a job."

"Any details?"

"Nothing except the phone number—and a certain amount of impatience. He sounds cranky."

"Fine."

I went into the inner office, pulled my phone off the desk, stuck my feet on it, and dialed the number. A male voice which could indeed be described as cranky answered.

"I'd like to speak to Sr. Centeno," I said.

"You have him."

"My name's Bannon, the private detective. I understand you called earlier."

"That's right," he said. "I want to see you."

"I'll be in my office all morning."

"I'm an old man," he said. "Would it be too much trouble if you came here?" I couldn't tell if he was being sarcastic or not.

"Is this about a possible job, Sr. Centeno?"

"It is."

"In that case I can come there."

"Coastside Real Estate. 333 McLeary Street, Ocean Park."

"I should be there in ten minutes or so."

"Good."

"By the way, are you any relation to Alex Centeno?" I asked.

"*Muy bueno*. I guess you are a detective at that, Mr. Bannon.

"I'm his father."

"I'll be there in ten minutes," I said.

He hung up without any amenities. It promised to be an interesting interview.

It was one of the smaller real estate offices—those that were gradually being pushed out of business by the two or three big ones. A couple of women and a man sat behind desks covered with telephones and papers. One wall was papered with thumbtacked property listings on index cards. The grey rug was going bald.

The man was about sixty-five, by my guess. He rose stiffly as I came in. He was thin and sallow-complexioned; the lenses of his glasses were tinted.

"Sr. Bannon?"

"Sí."

He stuck out a bony hand. "*Soy Centeno. Sientese, por favor.*"

I sat down in the chrome and vinyl chair next to his desk.

"It's about your son's disappearance," I said.

"You read the newspapers."

"I try to keep up with the police releases. That was about a week and a half ago. Where have they gone with it?"

"A *ninguna parte*. They've learned nothing at all."

"Disappearance cases can be

difficult."

He opened a drawer, pulled out a little plastic bottle, extracted two pills, and slugged them down with half a glass of water from a carafe on his desk.

"I'm not in good health," he said.

I looked interested.

"Arthritis, bursitis, a slipped disk, a weak heart, and various *malditas* allergies. It's not pleasant being old."

"It's not very pleasant being young these days."

"Nobody gives a damn about an old man's problems."

I figured if I let him pursue this favorite subject, we'd never get to the point, so I said: "Please give me the details, Sr. Centeno."

Eventually he got them all out with a lot of prodding. His son had left his office at four o'clock on Friday, December 23rd, and had not been seen since. The police had interviewed his co-workers, his neighbors, and his few other acquaintances ("Alex had no real friends, I'm afraid"), and had determined that he was generally liked, not in any trouble, seemed to have no enemies, no debts. Checks with airlines and ships leaving the island had turned up nothing.

"The problem is," concluded the father, "that we can find no

motive for Alex's disappearance at all."

"As I recall, he is unmarried," I said. "Any women in his life?"

"Alex is a confirmed bachelor. He's never had a serious relationship with a woman that I know of."

"Had he acted at all strangely lately?"

"As a matter of fact, he had. He'd become—*como se dice*?—somehow withdrawn. I would almost say secretive."

"As if he were holding something from you?"

"Not exactly. I don't know."

"Did he appear to be afraid?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Any problems at his work?"

"None that I know of. In fact, he was recently promoted. He's an accountant with Cruz Marine Enterprises."

Suddenly the old man began rotating his right forearm back and forth, back and forth. "Pain," he said. "Always pain." He opened his drawer again, took out another plastic bottle, and downed two pinkish colored pills.

"Tell me more about your son's personality," I said.

"You sound just like the useless police," he said irritably. "Many questions and no results."

"I can't get results without

the questions," I said. "Neither can they. Does your son have any unusual habits?"

"Most men who live alone over a long period of time develop eccentricities."

"Did you get along?"

"We've never understood each other very well—but he's my son. You always love your children. Do you have any children?"

"No. Elaborate on Alex's eccentricities."

"Well, for one thing he belonged to a strange religious group. They're called Las Luces, the Enlightenment. They wear long white robes at services and have their own 'Bible.' Their temple is in Santurce."

"Did the police check them out?"

"Yes, of course." He seemed to think a moment, then added: "Alex was peculiar in other ways. He liked to read odd books you never heard of. He had almost no social life. He was, I thought, excessively dedicated to his job. He talked constantly about his mother, although she died when he was twelve."

"How old is Alex now?"

"Thirty-seven."

"Do you think he might have purposely disappeared, Sr. Centeno?"

"No."

"You think someone—did him an injury?"

"I can't see why."

"What *do* you think?"

"I don't know *what* to think. That's why I decided to hire you. Will you take the case?"

"I charge twenty-five dollars an hour."

"*Está bien.*"

"I can't guarantee you anything."

"I know. You'll want a photograph, of course. I have one here."

He passed me a good clear snapshot of a slightly chubby man in his mid-thirties with a receding hairline and a pouty look around the lips. There wasn't much resemblance to his father. It was the same photo they had published in the papers.

"I'll keep in touch with you, Sr. Centeno. I'll probably want more information from you after I get started on this."

He handed me his business card. It also contained his home phone. Then he started opening and closing his hand as if it had just gone numb on him. He was still doing this and studying the hand with absorbed concern when I left.

I have no personal friends in the Missing Persons Division, but I do have one in

Homicide, Roberto Burgos; I called him to have him check the file on the Centeno case for me. He got back to me about four that afternoon:

"It's still wide open. They haven't come up with a thing."

"Did they run it thoroughly?"

"As far as I can see, all the obvious leads were run: interviews, airport, bank—his photo was even sent up to the States."

"No large withdrawal from his bank account?"

"All they found was a checking at Banco Popular. About \$2500 in it. It's still there."

"What do you think, Roberto, after reading the file?"

"There's no reason to suspect anything dirty. Which leaves a skip."

"Why would he skip?"

"He's a kook. There's one on every street corner these days. They do crazy things without any good reason. He'll show up some morning acting as if nothing had happened."

"People who skip usually make preparations. He didn't make any."

"*Es un loco.*"

"Not even money."

"*Es un loco.*"

"They checked the airlines."

"If he flew to the U.S. he could use a false name. A travel agent doesn't ask for your birth certificate. Physical descrip-

tions at airports don't usually get you anywhere."

"Well, thanks, Roberto."

"If I were you, I wouldn't waste my time, Sherlock Holmes."

"Don't you want to close that file?"

"It's not my file. I'm in Homicide."

"His father doesn't think he skipped."

"You should have been a psychologist," Roberto said. "Let me know if you come up with anything. And don't forget my cut for the file check."

He rang off and I phoned Frank Centeno at his office. I wanted his son's home address and the key to the place if the old man had it. He did, so I stopped by Coastside Real Estate and then drove to the building over in Ocean Park. It stood about a block from the sea on a fork between two streets, an odd, old triangular-shaped apartment house that had recently been given a facelift and promoted to a condominium.

I parked in the street and entered a tiny vestibule done in ripe pink tile. Centeno's name was on the buzzer for 4A. I took the lone, creaky elevator to the fourth floor and stepped out into a weird, trapezium-shaped hallway that was papered in

three different designs, all of them looking like something you'd find in a sailors' "night-club."

There were three apartments; 4A faced the elevator. I let myself into a large living room with cream walls, a cream sofa, a peacock chair, and several rattan pieces. He had a balcony with a pretty good view of the ocean between two other condos. The walls sported a dozen pictures ranging from Hieronymus Bosch to a purple and green mandala. None of them would have been able to infiltrate my living room. On a low table stood a photo, obviously old, of a woman in her early thirties. Her resemblance to Alex made it clear who she was. Fancy candles of various colors were scattered around the room.

The bedroom produced more strange pictures, another photo of the mother, a mahogany chest of drawers, and a bed set in a polished mahogany frame. It looked like a water bed but wasn't. But what attracted me most was the wall lined with books. I spent some time going over the titles: books on astrology, ancient history, stocks, religion, drugs, accounting, medieval torture, and a sprinkling of novels I'd never heard

of. A library that would have appealed to Edgar Allan Poe.

The bathroom and kitchen, both small and none too clean, produced nothing of interest.

I wasted some time opening drawers and closets (his clothes looked normal) and the medicine chest, even leafed through a few of the books. It was a waste of time because if there had been anything of importance to find, the police would have found it, and it would have appeared in their report.

But when I locked the door again, I felt that I knew Alex Centeno a little better. That was why I had come. The door of 4B opened while I was waiting for the elevator and a man joined me. He wore a red and white horizontally striped polo shirt and white shorts. His hair was dyed golden blond.

"*Usted es otro policía?*" he asked.

I told him yes, just to make things simpler.

"*Es una lástima,*" he said.

"It's a shame. You still don't know what happened to Sr. Centeno?"

"No, not yet."

"*Que mundo éste,*" he sighed.

"What a world we live in."

We rode down in the elevator, and he watched me walk to my car, which wasn't a police car

and didn't remotely resemble one.

It was nearly six. I had a hamburger and coffee in Howard Johnson's and called Sr. Centeno at his home to get the address of that religious group his son belonged to. It was on Fernandez Juncos Avenue right near the center of Santurce.

"They may not let you in," he said. "They don't like outsiders in the Temple."

"How do you know—have you been there?"

"Yes, once. They said I gave off unsympathetic vibrations."

"Why did you go?"

"To see if they knew anything about Alex, of course."

"And they didn't."

"That's what they said."

"I'll bring a sheet along," I said, "so I'll look like one of the guys."

It was a modest two-story building with EL TEMPLO DE LAS LUCES over the entrance in raised gold letters about eighteen inches high. Centeno had mentioned that they held evening services, and the double doors were open, so I walked in.

The floor of the vestibule was marble; maroon and gold drapes covered the walls. On the right was another set of wooden doors

with a hand-carved design. They were closed, but I could hear rhythmical chanting from behind them. In front of me was a railed marble staircase and on my left another door, partly open, behind which I heard voices. I knocked on this door and pushed it back slightly. After what Centeno had said, I'd decided that politeness and humility might be my best approach.

"*Quién es?*" questioned a soft voice.

I showed myself in the doorway.

"*Qué quiere usted?*" lisped a very fat man sitting behind a large desk. He was dressed in a high-class white blanket with gold trim, and his shaven head gleamed in the lamplight. To his right stood two burly men in suits and ties. Slightly to the right of the desk stood a woman, about thirty, also conventionally dressed.

"I would like to speak to the person in charge here, if possible," I said.

The fat man gave me a careful once-over through narrow, almost Oriental eyes. He folded his hands on the shiny desk top; a ring glittered on nearly every pudgy finger. "The person in charge is the High Priest," he said in his barely audible voice. "I am that person."

His Spanish didn't sound Puerto Rican. He didn't look Puerto Rican. I couldn't tell what he looked.

"Could we talk in private?" I asked politely.

He made a sign to the woman, who glided around me and out the door. "These gentlemen are always with me," he said, indicating the two burly types. "You are another policeman, are you not?"

"Not exactly. I'm a detective."

"About the disappearance of Alex Centeno?"

"His father is very worried."

"Naturally. Have a seat." He waved me to a white plush office chair in front of his desk.

I didn't like it: he was being too hospitable.

His huge frame inclined forward and he placed the fingertips of his hands together as if to show off his rings. "What can I do for you, Mr. . . . ?"

"Bannon."

He looked surprised. "You are an American?"

"My father was."

One of the suited men folded his arms across his chest and stared at me. The other leaned against the wall. I couldn't tell if they had guns under the jackets; I figured it was a fifty-fifty gamble.

"My name is Luna," hissed

the fat man with a smile that would curdle milk.

"I would appreciate any information you could give me about Alex Centeno, Mr. Luna."

"Not Mr. Luna," he corrected me. "Just Luna."

"Excuse me."

"I've already told the police that I know nothing whatever that would be helpful in investigating Brother Alex's disappearance," he said.

"Was he a member of your sect long?" I asked.

"We are not a sect, Mr. Bannon, we are a movement. We are the Enlightenment. The answer to your question is: four months, more or less."

His eyes were so narrow that I couldn't make out their color. The light wasn't very good in there.

"Are you a Christian group?" I asked.

"We are eclectic. We have taken the truths of all the great faiths. That is why we shall ultimately prevail."

The chanting from across the hall continued. Maddeningly monotonous.

"You have a nice place here," I said.

"We also have a religious camp in the country near Trujillo Alto," he smiled. "I'm afraid you are wasting my time and yours, Mr. Bannon."

"What do you suppose happened to Alex Centeno?" I asked.

"I don't suppose anything," he said. "All things are in the hands of the Unity."

I persisted.

"Do you think he purposely disappeared?"

He regarded me in silence for a moment. "I should think you could find something better to do with your time, Mr. Bannon. Your values seem very worldly to me."

"Everyone must live his life his own way," I said.

"No," he sibilated, "there are better ways and worse. Yours, I fear, is not one of the better. You peep into people's affairs, you pry into laundry baskets. Do you carry a gun, Mr. Bannon?"

"Sometimes," I said. "Why do you ask?"

"Simply because a man who must carry a gun is not doing God's work."

"Do they carry guns?" I asked, waving towards his two henchmen.

"You are becoming impertinent," he said, a touch of color showing on his smooth white dome. "I think you had better leave now."

The man against the wall pushed himself straight. The other didn't move.

"In any case, it is time for our

prayer before the Eternal Flame," Luna said. His smile was edging its way back. "When you realize the vanity of worldly things, Mr. Bannon, come back, don simple robes, and I will make you one of our Guardians of the Flame. Then you will find true peace."

"I'll give it some serious thought."

"Until then, please do not disturb us again," Luna said. He made the slightest of gestures to his two bodyguards. "My attendants will accompany you out."

"Thank you."

He pushed his bulk to a standing position. The two men started toward me. I turned and went out the door and across the vestibule and into the street. When I started the car, they were still standing in the doorway.

Edwin Cruz Serrano, the head of Cruz Marine Enterprises, was a mustached man in his forties with a belly that showed that rice and beans did not disagree with him. He wore an expensive dark green suit, a pearl shirt, and a matching rust tie and pocket handkerchief. He looked like a man who would like expensive cars, expensive food, and expensive women.

I'd arrived at his office in Puerta de Tierra at nine A.M., and the place had an air of people just settling in to work. He'd had me come in without any wait at all.

"My secretary tells me you are investigating Alex's disappearance."

"That's right. His father has hired me."

"What would you like to know?" Cruz asked.

"Anything—everything—you can tell me about Alex Centeno."

"There's not that much to say. Alex has been with us about eleven years. I don't think he once took an unnecessary day off. In fact you could set your watch by the time of his arrival every morning. We all liked him here, including the people who worked under him. Only recently we increased his salary. A damned good accountant—very essential to a firm like ours."

"Just what is Cruz Marine Enterprises?" I asked.

"We buy and recondition old yachts for resale. Would you be interested in seeing our work-yard?"

I declined.

"Is there much money in that?" I asked.

He smiled. "You'd be surprised."

"I'm trying to dig up some motive for Sr. Centeno's disappearance. People don't vanish without a reason."

"I'm afraid you won't find it here," Cruz said. "There were no problems connected with Alex's work—at least none that I know of."

"Could there have been some you don't know of?"

"I doubt it. Not with Alex."

He took out a long, thin, expensive cigar and offered me one. I declined. "Can you think of *any* sort of trouble he may have been in?"

He pondered a moment. "There wouldn't be any women problems—Alex was strictly a loner. Eccentric. There shouldn't be any money problems either: he received a good salary with us."

"Did he gamble—at the track, for instance?"

Cruz smiled. "You don't know Alex very well."

"What about the religious group he belonged to?"

"That I wouldn't know much about." He blew out a long, blue stream of smoke. It smelled good.

"Perhaps you should speak to Ms. Kahn," he suggested.

"Who is Ms. Kahn?" I asked.

"The person who worked most closely with Alex. She's also an accountant. She would know

him better than anyone else."

"I'd like to talk to her."

"Certainly. I'll show you the way."

He rose and walked around the desk. We started down the short hall.

"What do you think happened to him, Sr. Cruz?"

"I can't imagine. I didn't think Alex was eccentric enough to do something like this. But you never can tell about people, can you?"

"No," I said.

He turned into an office on our right. It was actually an ante-office presided over by a plump little woman in her fifties with a nice, worried face. Cruz good-morninged her and passed through to the office beyond with me in tow.

The second office was tight and efficient looking. Most of it was taken up by a desk, behind which sat a *norteamericana* of about thirty-five, not unattractive, with Doris Day freckles and short, dusty brown hair. She was wearing a summer-weight tan suit. You can walk around San Juan for a long time without running into a woman wearing a suit. Cruz introduced us and left me to her keeping.

Ms. Kahn told me to sit down and then regarded me in silence with cool, wide-spaced, wide

open grey eyes. She was one of those people who never seem to blink.

"You're the first private detective I've met," she said in English. Her voice was as clear and low as the purling of a frigid mountain spring. I couldn't tell if she was indifferent to me or disliked me, but I didn't think she liked me. She wore a wedding ring, so she probably wasn't a man hater. Although you never can tell.

"Mr. Cruz says you knew Alex Centeno better than anyone else here," I ventured.

"Yes, that's probably true."

"What did you think when he disappeared?"

"I was as astonished as anyone."

"Could you just talk about him, Ms. Kahn? Anything you remember. I'm trying to get a picture. You never can tell what might turn out to be important."

"All right."

She talked for maybe ten minutes, bringing up various things as they occurred to her. I learned nothing that I hadn't learned elsewhere. A little more detail, but the overall sketch remained the same.

While she talked I took out a cigarette, and she pushed an ashtray across to me: a huge ceramic job that said, "Don't

spill any of your damned ashes on my desk, buster." The desk also supported an unusual rock collection, about fifteen colored specimens of various types and shapes, all of them the right size to brain somebody with.

The plump woman interrupted us apologetically. She needed some figure for a report she was typing up.

"I don't recall it," Ms. Kahn said. "Just a moment."

She reached down and pulled from somewhere what looked like a suede cosmetics case. From it she slipped a calculator, and in less time than it would have taken her to blink, if she ever blinked, she'd run a fairly complicated computation through and come up with the plump woman's figure. She handled that machine with more familiarity than most women have with a lipstick. Ms. Kahn herself used no make-up, except for a little powder.

A few minutes later she'd terminated her verbal picture of Alex Centeno. "Have I been of any help?" she asked.

"Yes," I lied. "By the way, would you know how Alex first became involved with that religious group, Ms. Kahn?"

"I think he heard about it from Mr. Cruz."

I let that digest a moment. "Does Mr. Cruz also belong to

Las Luces?"

"Oh no. I don't know exactly how it happened. I suppose he just thought it was the sort of thing that might appeal to Alex. Apparently it was."

"Yes," I said. "Well, thank you very much for your time, Ms. Kahn."

I got up to go.

"Look," she said, "I know I have a rather cool manner about me, and I may have given you the impression I don't care what happened to Alex. That's not true. I do care. We were, I think, friends."

"Do you think it would do me any good to talk to anyone else here?" I asked her.

"No," she said. "I very much doubt it."

I thought it might do me some good to talk to Mr. Edwin Cruz again, but that could wait. There was a certain advantage in my knowing he'd been holding back on me. I wanted to think on that a bit before I reinterviewed Cruz.

The phone call arrived at six fifteen that evening just as I was closing up the office. I recognized her voice immediately.

"Mr. Bannon, I just received a phone call from Alex Centeno."

"Where is he?"

"He wouldn't tell me. He said he was all right, but afraid. He couldn't give me any details because it might jeopardize my safety."

"Well then, just why did he call?"

"He said he didn't know who else to call: I was his only friend. He wanted a place to hide. He sounded very, very upset."

So did she. She seemed to have lost all that cool control she'd displayed so magnificently that morning.

"Look, Ms. Kahn, this doesn't wash. Why didn't he call his father?"

"I think he may have been calling from his father's. In any case, he sounded in a terrible hurry to leave wherever he was. I didn't know what to tell him. I didn't know where he could stay. What do you think it all means?"

"Did you suggest he go to the police?"

"Yes. He said he couldn't: it would expose him to 'them.' So, at a loss for anything else to suggest, I suggested he get in touch with you. He said he would have to risk it and that he would meet you tonight at nine thirty outside a restaurant called La Paseadora at Boca de Cangrejos."

"How would he get there?"

"He didn't say, but he has a car, a blue Dodge compact."

"All this sounds as phony as three-inch eyelashes, Ms. Kahn."

"I know," she said, sounding helpless and sincere, "But I swear I'm telling you the truth."

"I may go there and I may not," I said. "If I do, you can be damned sure I'll be carrying a gun."

"I'm sorry," she said, "I shouldn't have mentioned your name. But he sounded so afraid."

"Well, thanks, Ms. Kahn—I think." I hung up.

I pulled a *caneca* of Palo Viejo out of my desk drawer and poured a shot that would numb a rhinoceros. I looked out the window at a huge red sun setting over the Condado rooftops. The sun was almost the color of blood. The only sound was the steady hum of traffic outside, punctuated by an occasional car horn. I sipped the rum and ruminated. After a second one, I felt a little less like a dog with a can tied to his tail. I wasn't sure who the can was, but I was damned sure I was the dog.

To hell with Alex Centeno, to hell with Ms. Kahn, to hell with having my brains shot out in the dark parking lot of a seaside restaurant. The Paseadora closed at nine. It would be a good place to knock someone

off. I must be doing something right if they wanted to knock me off.

I unlocked the steel bottom drawer of my desk and pulled out my office gun and its holster. It's a Browning BDA .380 and less than seven inches long, but it packs a punch and holds thirteen .380 Auto cartridges. It gets them off fast, too. I've always been a sap for mysterious phone calls.

I left my office at seven, had a leisurely dinner at a nearby hotel, and called Alma to tell her I wouldn't be seeing her that evening. By then it was almost eight thirty. I killed forty-five minutes more by strolling along Ashford Avenue and studying the birds of plumage who'd flown down from New York in the midwinter migration. Once a year in Puerto Rico they wear all the clothes they're afraid to wear back home. I'd be afraid to wear them anywhere. At nine fifteen I pulled my car out of the lot and headed down Baldorioty for Boca de Cangrejos.

It was a cool, clear night. Traffic was heavy but moved steadily. I swung left at the airport and cruised down the long straight stretch past the Balneario Isla Verde. The bridge over the inlet was well lighted and several men and boys were

fishing from it. Beyond the bridge some of the snack places and restaurants near the water were still doing business. If this was on the level, Centeno had chosen a good place: busy enough to stage an unnoticed meeting but at the same time private enough. The Paseadora on the right, next to the inlet, was closed, as I'd known it would be. Three cars were parked in its quiet lot. One of them looked like a blue Dodge compact.

My watch read nine twenty-eight—I was going to be a very punctual target. As I angled down towards the restaurant, one of the other two cars parked in front suddenly switched on its lights and pulled out of the lot. It was picking up speed rapidly as it passed me. It looked like a dark red or maroon LeMans with a single man behind the wheel. He disappeared over the bridge as I approached the restaurant entrance. I already had my gun out. That's when I noticed that several men on foot were headed, hesitantly but inexorably, in the same direction I was. I stopped next to one of them.

"*Qué pasó?*" I said. "What's up?"

"Sounded like gunshots from here," he said.

"Did you get the license num-

ber of that car that just left?"

He looked at me as if I were crazy.

Four of us converged on the blue compact at about the same time, but they stood back and left me to do the close-up investigating. It didn't take much investigating. Alex's eyes had that peculiar vacant look they only have when you are dead, and his pouty lips seemed reproving, as if he didn't deserve what had happened to him. Dark blood flowed from his head and neck onto the seat back.

I asked the nearest man where there was a telephone and told them not to touch anything while I called the police. They weren't anxious to touch anything. I called Roberto Burgos' office from a nearby restaurant. He was still there, working late. He'd be working later.

I pulled into my parking lot at eleven oh-five. I had stayed a while at the scene to fill Roberto in on the details. He'd said he'd call me if they turned up anything. He would also notify Alex's father. My elevator took forever coming down from the tenth floor, and two party-goers got out, arguing about how much he'd had to drink and whether she should drive. I pushed six, rode up, unlocked my door, and headed straight

for the kitchen and the liquor supply.

The kitchen light didn't work. My first thought was that I'd forgotten my bill, my second was that the bulb had blown. I didn't get to my third thought because there was a sudden explosion behind me and simultaneously the sound of crashing glass about a foot to the left of my head. I went down, and a second bullet seared across the top of my scalp. By now I had the Browning out and was peppering the entranceway of the kitchen as fast as I could pull them off. I heard him run, I heard the hall door slam back and then the door to the stairs.

When I reached the top of the stairs, he was out of sight below me. I took them about five at a time, as he must be doing, and as I reached the second floor, I heard the door to the lobby slam back. I saw his retreating back through the glass walls of the lobby; but by the time I was outside he was already tearing the guts out of his car and grinding up the hill. My car was in the lot; I'd never catch him. His license plate light was off, but it was the same deep red LeMans I had seen earlier that night. The man behind the wheel was big and wearing a dark suit—that was all I could say about him.

I went back upstairs and shooed the curious neighbors away from my door. One of them remarked that nothing like this had ever happened in their building before. I shut the hall door and switched the fuses in my fuse box back on. Then I called Homicide to leave a message for Roberto to phone me when he got in.

My scalp hurt, but I could tell it was superficial. The interior decoration of my kitchen had been altered by a sprinkling of bullet holes; the floor was littered with glass and plaster.

I should have called Frank Centeno. I should have called him before I went to meet Alex. But I didn't feel up to talking to a man who had just been told by the police that his son had been shot to death.

All in all it hadn't been one of my great days.

The phone rang about one A.M. I was asleep. I didn't feel like getting up. I didn't feel like doing anything. I got up and answered the phone.

"It's nice one of us can get some sleep," Roberto said.

"How did the old man take it?"

"As you would expect—very badly."

"What's the story on the shooting?"

"Two bullets in the head and one in the neck, fired from about eight feet away. We found the spent cartridge cases near the car: .32 Colt Autos. Good shooting from that distance in the dark."

"Did you get anything on the car?"

"Not yet."

"Well, it's a dark red Le-Mans, a year or two old. I saw it again when I got back to my apartment. There are two .32 Colt Auto cases on my hallway floor that you can add to your collection."

"Tell me more," Roberto said.

I gave him all of it. My head still hurt. When I'd hung up, I took a couple of pain killers that I keep in the medicine chest and they knocked me out until the sunlight woke me in the morning.

By the time I'd taken a long, long shower and downed two cups of coffee, it was a quarter after nine. I dialed Cruz Marine and asked to speak to Ms. Kahn.

"Alex Centeno was shot last night—did you hear?"

"No." There was a long pause. "How badly shot was he?"

"I'm afraid he's dead," I said.

Another long silence. When she spoke again, her voice sounded flat and empty: "Tell me how it happened."

I told her; she didn't inter-

rupt once. "My God" was all she said as I finished.

"The police should be there any minute," I said. "I told them about your call."

"Yes, of course," she said.

"What kind of car does Mr. Cruz drive?"

"What?" She seemed stunned by the suddenness of the question. "He has two—I don't know the makes."

"Is one of them a dark red, medium sized American—recent vintage?"

"Yes." Another pause. "You don't think—"

"Is Cruz there?"

"No, I don't think he's come in yet."

"I don't think he will," I said.

"I don't think he'll be at home today either. Thanks, Ms. Kahn. I'm sorry about Alex."

I dialed Frank Centeno's number. He came on after two rings.

"Aló?"

I told him who I was and expressed my sorrow about his son's death. He didn't say anything. Then: "The police are here now—asking me the questions they would have liked to ask last night."

"Do you mind if I come out, too, Sr. Centeno?"

"No," he said. "What is there for me to mind now?"

I made it out to Punta las

Marias in fifteen minutes flat—a new record. There was an unmarked green car in front of his house, an old wooden place that could use a coat of paint more than I could use Lesley-Anne Down. It had once been a quiet residential street; it wasn't any more. There weren't too many of those left in San Juan. There weren't too many of those left in the whole goddamned world.

Centeno opened the door. I joined Roberto and two other detectives in the living room.

"The LeMans belongs to Edwin Cruz," I said. "He hasn't showed up at the office today."

Roberto jumped for the telephone next to the couch. He told his office to dispatch men to the airport and to any ships scheduled to leave that day.

"You'd better get some men down to Cruz Marine, too," I said. "Remember, he reconditions yachts."

He added those instructions and also sent two officers to Cruz's house. "When things break, they break," he said as he put down the phone.

"I don't think Cruz will try to skip today," I said. "He's too smart for that. He'll also need time to make some preparations. Anyway, I think I know where he is."

I had their undivided attention.

"It can wait a few minutes," I said. "If I'm right, he'll stay put a while. Do you mind if I ask Sr. Centeno some questions?"

"Be my guest," Roberto said.

I turned to the old man. Today he looked older and just as unhealthy as he'd been imagining himself.

"Was Alex here yesterday, Sr. Centeno?"

"He was here about an hour, as I've already told the police."

"He made a phone call?"

"Yes, to a woman named Gloria. I was in the room."

"Who advised him to get in touch with you," Roberto interrupted. "We've already been over this ground."

"Alex was afraid to stay here," I continued. "Someone was after him; that someone, it now appears, was Cruz. What did Alex say about the trouble he was involved in?"

"Nothing specific. He was in very bad condition. I'd say he had lost fifteen pounds. He's been mistreated."

"Where? By whom?"

"All he would say was that he'd been 'in the country.' He didn't want to involve me, he said."

"What else did he say?"

"I can't think of anything else."

"Are you absolutely sure?"

The old man closed his eyes, trying his best to remember. I turned to Roberto:

"Cruz was waiting for Alex to show up here. It was about the only place he could go. When Alex left, Cruz followed him and saw that he had arranged to meet someone. He felt he had no choice but to shoot Alex before the meeting took place. As he was leaving the scene, he passed me coming in. Apparently he got a glance of my face. So he waited for me at my apartment later to finish me off, too—he couldn't be sure how much I knew."

"There was one other thing," Centeno said suddenly. "Something very odd. He seemed to be talking to himself—I'd never seen him in such a condition."

"What was it he said?" I prodded him.

"Well, at some point during the hour he made a remark like: 'You know, there are a lot of people who want to come to the States.'"

"What do you think he meant by that?" Roberto asked.

Centeno shrugged his shoulders tiredly. "He was half crazy with fatigue."

"Not that crazy," I said. "That's the last piece."

"It is for you, Sherlock Holmes," Roberto said, "but the rest of us plodding dolts are still

in the dark."

"It's time for a trip to the country, Roberto. We'll need some more men. We're going to pay a surprise visit to Sr. Cruz."

The camp was on Route 851 in the hills beyond Trujillo Alto. There was an eight foot stone wall bordering the road, broken by one entrance over which hung a modest wooden sign that said only "Las Luces." The entrance boasted heavy iron gates, chained and padlocked. One of the cops produced a big chain cutter from the trunk of his car. It took two of them to cut through it. A narrow gravel road wound uphill from the gates and disappeared among the trees. We numbered eight men in all, including four cops in uniform. All of us were armed. We started up the gravel road in a three-car parade; under the shadowing trees, the road was cool and quiet.

"They have a lot of land here," Roberto said. He stroked his mustache nervously. "Do you expect any trouble?"

"They don't—therefore I don't. Cruz, of course, will be armed. They probably have some other arms around, but we'll catch them by surprise."

"I've ordered my men to jump out with their weapons drawn."

"It doesn't hurt to play safe."

We passed a playing field and a basketball court, several small wooden buildings that looked deserted, a large piece of cultivated land, and a water tower.

"I'm surprised they don't have more security," Roberto said.

"More security might make people suspicious and destroy their front."

We topped the hill and looked down upon a wide clearing where several long, barracks-like buildings clustered around a larger two-story redwood structure. The main building was handsome, fronted by a long porch. Beside it was a parking area in which sat two cream colored vans, a white Cadillac with a black vinyl top, and a powder blue Cutlass Supreme. On the other side of the parking lot was what looked like a dining hall. Quite a few people loitered around the barracks-like buildings. When they noticed our three cars (two of them marked) descending the hill, they started to shout and several broke at a run for the surrounding woods.

"Too many to chase," Roberto said.

"We don't want them, we want Cruz."

We gunned the cars down into the clearing and screeched to a dusty stop in front of the largest building. The firing be-

gan before we were out of the cars. They seemed to be training down on us from the second story windows. We bailed out behind the cars, the uniformed cops already returning the fire. Roberto swore as he unholstered his own .38 Special. I concentrated my Browning on one of the two windows from which the firing came. Bullets banged off the car hoods.

"If there's no back exit, we've got them," I said.

"Why don't you check," Roberto suggested.

I dived out to the left of our lead car and ran like a hunch-backed rabbit for the building. The porch overhang protected me from overhead fire. I slithered around the corner, down the side of the building, paused at the next corner to look for any possible unpleasantness, and rounded it just as Cruz broke from a ground floor window, stumbled, and then started sprinting.

"Don't try it," I shouted.

He turned and fired at me, but didn't really give himself time to aim and the shot went wild.

"Freeze, Cruz," I shouted again.

He kept running.

I lined him up carefully and squeezed off three at the lower third of his body. He lurched

after the third but kept moving. I fired off two more and he went down. He writhed on the ground like a sick belly dancer. The shooting behind me had suddenly ceased. I walked over to where Edwin Cruz lay. His face was screwed up with pain. "*Hijo de puta*," he said to me, and even those three words seemed an effort. He was bleeding from both legs.

Roberto came running from the side of the building. He took in the situation and slowed down to a trot. "The two in front have given up," he said. "One of them's wounded. My boys are going through the place."

"I think I know who those two would be. It was just our bad luck they were around."

"Not bad luck, Mr. Bannon," a voice said from a window above me. "They always go where I go."

I recognized the measured lisp even before I saw the fat shoulders and the bald dome.

"They'll be going where you go now, too," I said. "Why don't you come down and enjoy the sunshine, Mr. Luna. Consider it another form of the Eternal Flame."

He smiled and disappeared from the window.

"You'd better see how many of those barracks people you can round up," I said to Roberto.

"They're probably all *ilegales*."

While I telephoned from Luna's office for an ambulance (Luna being kind enough to direct me to the telephone) the seven policemen herded together the residents of the camp. Some of them had not even left their barracks, mostly the women. Others had stopped running as soon as the shooting started and had thrown up their hands. Eventually we had a group of thirty-four gathered in front of the main building, the majority of them young males, all of them looking very scared. They were chattering in Cuban and Dominican Spanish, Haitian French. Only four of them turned out to be Puerto Ricans.

Roberto called in for the wagons.

"So he was mixed up in a dirty business," Frank Centeno said sadly but not all that surprised.

"At first he didn't know what was going on," I said. "Cruz, knowing your son's eccentricities, recommended the 'religious' sect to him. Cruz himself couldn't afford any overt contact with Las Lucés, so Alex became his unwitting messenger, his liaison man. It was only a matter of time before Alex woke up, and when he did, he decided he cared more about

money than religion. If his boss was corrupt, if his High Priest was corrupt, why shouldn't he be? He asked for a cut of the profits, and they agreed. His mistake was in not knowing when to stop pushing. Eventually he asked for too high a percentage and threatened to go to the police with what he knew if they didn't come across.

"Cruz thought it would be cheaper to find another liaison man, but Luna drew the line short of murder—maybe some of his religious pretense had rubbed off on him. I think he was just afraid to go that far. So Luna's two henchmen took Alex out to Trujillo Alto to 'recondition' him the way Cruz reconditioned his yachts. Yesterday Alex escaped."

"But why did Luna *tell* you about the camp in the country?"

"He also mentioned it to the police. They would have found out about it soon enough—by mentioning it himself, he diverted suspicion from it."

"My poor boy," Frank Centeno said, "I never did understand him." He dropped his head wearily on the back of his chair. "How many illegal immigrants did they smuggle in?"

"Over a thousand, according to Cruz—into both Puerto Rico

and Florida. He had the boats and Luna had the perfect place to keep the people until they could be dispersed on the island or sent on to the coast. Cruz squeezed every dollar he could out of them for the trip. Those who couldn't scrape up his fee had to work for him until he was paid off, either in his boatyard or in other jobs he found for them. It was about as close to slave labor as you can get these days."

Centeno lifted his head from the chair back. "I appreciate your coming out here personally, Sr. Bannon."

"The police will want to talk to you again."

"I know."

Since his son's reappearance, I had not seen him take a pill or make one complaint about his health.

"Can we settle your bill in a few days?" he asked, trying not to sound impolite. "I find it hard to get my wits together just now."

I said, "I'm sorry about how it turned out, Sr. Centeno. There is no bill: I didn't find Alex."

"But your time."

"Oh, time is something I can afford, Sr. Centeno. It's the wear and tear on my illusions that gets me down."

FICTION

THE LONG MEMORY



Illustration by Trudi Smith

by Louis Weinstein

Within an hour of getting the job, early in the evening, I went looking for Pat O'Hara. If anyone could locate a missing barge in a hurry, Pat was the man. Pat is a retired New York City dockmaster, a widower, and lives on a houseboat at Lacey's Marina in Brooklyn. Pat's houseboat is tied up at the outer end, north side, of the wooden pier from which Lacey's floats and slips spread out like lattice work. Not a big job, not palatial. But then Pat has never been much for show.

The tide was out and the houseboat was riding low, the fender tires bumping against the timber pilings with every swell. Standing with one foot on the backing log, I yelled from the pier, "Anybody home?"

I knew he was. A light was burning in the kitchen, and I could see shadows moving on the beige kitchen window curtains he is always saying he doesn't like and is going to replace. Music was pounding out from somewhere inside. Rock music. Pat likes other kinds, too—he plays a pretty fair piano—but the last few years he's gotten into rock, to keep up, he says, with his four teenage grandchildren, through understanding their kind of music. He's very close to those kids, and his idea makes sense to me. He's probably the oldest fan you'll find at the Grateful Dead concerts.

In a minute he appeared, standing in the doorway and peering up through the darkness at me.

"Phil Mandel, you old son of a gun. Come on down. How's the private eye business these days?"

"Keeping me busy," I said. He knew that wasn't exactly true. He knows I'm never swamped with work.

Clutching a big brown bag, I scrambled down the ladder nailed to the side of the pier and followed him inside. I set the bag on the kitchen table and gave him a good look. The man was incredible. I knew he was seventy-four or -five, but he didn't look a day over forty and hadn't aged noticeably in the twenty years I'd known him. He was straight and spare as ever. A tall, handsome man, strong featured, the light blue eyes deceptively mild. He still had a full head of black hair, all his own teeth, a face blank of wrinkles. He could have passed as an older brother of his two sons, one a lawyer, the other a police sergeant. I wondered if he could still beat me on the handball court; which was where

I'd first met him. I was sure he could still outwalk me. When he was still on the job the young guys he had to break in on the waterfront districts used to complain they couldn't keep up with him, he moved too fast for them. They couldn't keep up with him in other important ways, like the think department, but it generally took them a while to find that out. If he ever forgot anything or anyone, or made a mistake in putting things together, it had escaped my notice. And he was a walking encyclopedia of the waterfront; its geography and history. That's the kind of mind Pat has.

"Here's something for you. Just your brand." I emptied a couple of six packs of Green Valley beer from the bag onto his table. The table top was sparking clean. The whole place looked as if it were a fussy old maid's parlor.

"Phil, you old fox, don't try to kid an old kidder." He reached over and choked off the spine-jarring hard rock caterwauling from the radio, carrying on about a love turned as sour as six-month-old milk. "This is not a social call." He popped open a can. "Thanks for the beer, just the same." He took a quick swallow. "What's on your mind?"

"That's what I like about you, Pat," I said. "The way you get right to the point. Something's come my way that's up your alley. I need your help in finding a barge."

"What kind of barge?" Pat asked.

"A hundred-foot deck scow, loaded with better than one hundred tons of South American copper ingots. The scow, the *John B*, owned by Phelan Barge, disappeared from the Baldwin Street pier sometime last night. There's a big fee in it for me, if I find it. If not, all I get is expenses and experience."

"I read something about it in the evening paper," Pat said. "They fished the barge captain out of the river this morning. It was conveniently foggy last night. Very interesting."

"Then you know as much as I do," I said. "Phelan is in a snit. So are the steamship line, the pier operator, the Waterfront Commission, the insurance guys, who knows who else. I'm working for the insurance guys."

"I'm familiar with that kind of operation," Pat said. "The copper is loaded over the side onto scows and then the scows are towed to the copper companies, either up the Hudson or in New Jersey. The paper said the copper in this case came off a Scoville Line freighter

docked at the Sterling Street pier. The scow was then shifted across the slip to the Baldwin Street pier. That's an open wharfage pier."

"What's an open wharfage pier?"

"A pier open to all users for short term tie-ups, with city permission. They pay a wharfage fee, a daily rate based on the class of vessel, which could be anything from the smallest pleasure boat up to a battleship. But that's not important. Your problem is what happened to the scow and its cargo."

"It couldn't be a big sneak? Reload it on the ship, even another ship, and send it back to South America?"

Pat broke out laughing.

"Phil, can a whale fly without anyone noticing it? Too many enforcement agencies are on the alert—the coast guard, customs, the Waterfront Commission, the police, all the port security people. Whoever pulled off this job is too smart to try anything that dumb. It was pretty well planned, down to making the hit on a foggy night."

"What's the best way to look? Where do you begin?" I asked.

"Did I ever tell you the story about old man Pareto?" he asked.

"No, I don't think so," I said.

"Well, old man Pareto—he must have been past seventy at the time—was one of the last of the old breed of water rats, ready to do anything to turn a buck. Twenty-six, seven years ago, I think it was, he was running a dump somewhere out toward the Queens line. Paardegat Basin, Spring Creek, somewhere out that way, I don't remember exactly where."

He paused and pulled at his beer, then sat quietly, a faraway look in his eyes. Browsing in his long memory took him completely out of the here and now. I knew Pat well enough to know he knew just what year all this happened and which of the dozens of inlets, large and small, that bite into the New York shoreline was the one where this Pareto had his dump.

"Pat," I said, "while we're sitting here jawing, and thinking, this barge could be getting hustled so far away our chances of ever finding it wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel. If you were in my shoes, where would you look? How would you go about it?"

He wasn't at all ruffled. "The obvious ways are by helicopter and boat," he said mildly. "But let me guess. A thorough search of the entire harbor and some distance beyond—as far as the barge could

be moved overnight—has been made. The search has come up dry. Right?"

"I wouldn't be on the case if it hadn't," I said.

"Or if they thought conventional air or water search had any chance of working. Not that they won't keep trying. Any word on how the barge captain died? It was foul play, wasn't it?"

"Shot in the head. At close range. Probably while asleep. A large caliber hand gun. Poor bugger. He never had a chance."

"Looking for the tug," he said, "will get you nowhere, assuming it was a tug that moved the scow from the Baldwin Street pier. No doubt the city watchman has been questioned and knows nothing. There's a lot of movement there. Barges are dropped off and picked up at all hours, day and night. The watchman's main job is fire watch, that and keeping bums from camping out on the pier. None of the big towing companies would let themselves get involved in anything like this. On their tugs, everything gets logged, every minute gets accounted for. Some of the fringe outfits—a hand-me-down tug or two, a two or three man operation—maybe would take the risk, one bold move for a big pay-off. Grand larceny and murder are nothing to sneeze at."

"It's a nasty business," I said. "But whoever moved the barge didn't necessarily have to know about the murder."

He nodded. "That's true. But let me get back to old man Pareto, okay?"

I shrugged, and he went on.

"**H**e had a good thing going for him at that dump. He was collecting for every load of dirt or rubble brought in from excavation and demolition jobs, hundreds of trucks a day. I know, because I covered that district off and on—they switched us around every three months or so. The idea was to keep us dockmasters from getting too familiar with the people we had to deal with, the businesses and property owners in the district, and being tempted to overlook violations, out of friendship or just plain graft."

"Familiarity breeds payola?" I said.

"Something like that," he said. "I've got to say the temptation was there. Anyhow, he was getting it both ways: collecting for the fill and standing to make a mint from the real estate the fill was creating. Pareto was a shrewd old bird, looking ahead to the time

when what was nothing but marshy wasteland in an out of the way corner of Brooklyn would be developed with housing. As you know, the area is all built up now. Of course his operation was strictly legitimate. He had proper permits from the Department of Marine and Aviation and the Army Corps of Engineers. He bent over backwards to keep within the specified boundaries and to keep any improper fill from being dumped—no garbage, no paper, no wood, just dirt, brick, and broken concrete and asphalt, all good clean, solid stuff. The inspectors and dockmasters kept him from even thinking of cheating. We used to joke with him about his not stopping until he finished his highway to Windy Point, a few miles across Jamaica Bay. He also ran a junk yard there—old engines, boats, boilers, drums, some lumber—anything he could salvage and sell. He was an operator, old man Pareto, a schemer. He had connections everywhere. . . .”

Pat fell silent, staring at the beige curtains and frowning. “I’ve got to do something about those curtains,” he scowled. “Too dull. Depressing. Get something brighter—red or yellow.”

“Another beer?” I suggested.

“I don’t think so,” he shook his head. “My idea is you go home now and get yourself a good night’s sleep. You and I are going to take a little cruise bright and early tomorrow.”

“Bright I can’t promise,” I said. “How early is early?”

“Daybreak. That should be early enough for you. You bring the eats. We may be out for a while. Maybe all day.”

Pat was already on the boat, the *Barbara Ann*, a trim twenty-four footer named after his oldest granddaughter, which he kept tied up outside the houseboat, when I arrived. The first light of morning was starting to filter through the light autumn fog sitting on the bay.

“Cast off the lines and we’ll get going,” Pat said. Bundled up in a heavy wool lumberjack jacket, he was standing at the wheel and fiddling with the radio dials. His sailor’s stocking hat made him look like someone out of Jack London.

“Where we going?” I asked. “You haven’t told me yet.”

“Nowhere in particular,” Pat said. “Just a little harbor tour.”

He sounded the horn in proper nautical warning just as if he were taking a big liner out of a slip into a fairway. The boat put-

putted out into the channel and he pointed it generally north.

"Of course you realize I still try to get out in the boat at least once a week, besides my walking tours, just to keep from growing stale. So I have a pretty good idea of what's going on where," he said.

"Then you have some notion of where the *John B* might be?"

"Not exactly," he said, "considering there are 578 miles of waterfront just in the five boroughs." He glanced at me. "Do you think you could steer without knocking into anything? Keep about four or five hundred feet out?"

"I guess so," I said. I'd been out with him before, just fishing, and he'd let me take the helm. He knew some good spots for blackfish, porgy, and striped bass. There was a big difference, though, between handling the boat way off shore with nothing else in sight and running it in a busy harbor.

While I steered, Pat scanned the shoreline through field glasses. We cruised past a stretch of piers, then an assortment of waterfront installations—marine repair services, railroad carfloat terminals, boat yards, a row boat rental place, a launch service. The radio was going, set on some kind of marine channel, the volume low. If Pat was listening to it, he didn't let on. Now and again he shifted the glasses from one hand to the other. We passed a Con Edison plant, its tall stacks floating small ribbons of pale brown smoke skyward, and reached a park, bounded by a rough-faced sea wall of granite blocks, mooring cleats spaced along the curve. He let the glasses drop and turned to me,

"Go ahead, Phil, ask me what I'm looking for."

"A deck scow, loaded with a fortune in copper ingots," I said, knowing that wasn't the right answer.

"Wrong," Pat said. "The police would have found that in nothing flat. I'm looking for a change in scenery—something that wasn't there the last time I looked, or something out of place."

The park behind us, Pat resumed his watch. The sun was up now, burning off the last of the fog. Waterfront activity was in full swing. Police helicopters roved overhead, and some coast guard whirlybirds, too. A harbor police launch was poking along the waterfront not far from us.

"I see the police got up early this morning," I said.

"No earlier than usual," Pat answered, with a half smile.

Another long stretch of steamship piers came up, but Pat didn't seem much interested in them.

"Did I ever finish telling you about old man Pareto?" he asked.

"No, you never did finish that story," I said. "I'm listening."

"Well," he picked up the thread, "old man Pareto had this big fill operation. To contain the fill, keep it from spilling over beyond the proper limits, he used anything in the way of old floating equipment he could get his hands on. Marine operators were glad to get rid of their obsolete tugs, leaky old dredges, broken-down barges, whatever else had outlasted its usefulness. Anything would do for old man Pareto, so long as he could get it lined up and sunk in place to keep the fill where it belonged. But his bulkhead was made up mostly of old barges and deck scows. It was easier and cheaper than putting in a retaining wall of rip rap or interlocking sheet steel piling."

He broke off. We had pushed past Bush Terminal, nosed up through Gowanus Canal, put Erie Basin and the Port Authority piers behind us. Over most of this stretch he had raised the glasses to his eyes only occasionally.

"Make a turn to port," he said.

I swung the boat around. Our direction was across the East River, under the Brooklyn Bridge. He spun dials on the radio, spoke into the mike,

"On the way to St. George, for a swing, counterclockwise, about Staten Island. Out."

I didn't need a blueprint to know what that was about. Pat wasn't going to let us get backed into a tight corner.

"You'd better let me take the wheel," Pat said. "It gets pretty tricky in here, with the current and all the traffic."

The Manhattan East River piers were dead and didn't need Pat's attention.

"Why Staten Island?" I asked. "It'll eat up half a day."

"We've got time. Unless I miss my guess, that scow isn't going anywhere. What we don't cover today, we'll hit tomorrow. No one's going to beat us to it, and Staten Island makes a great hideaway—dozens of boat graveyards, hundreds of abandoned craft, barges everywhere. Most important, Staten Island is within easy reach of the Baldwin Street pier. Keep in mind, Phil, the time and light element involved. The scow had to be safely at its present

berth well before daylight. Otherwise the police couldn't have missed it."

"You're the boss," I said. "I'm only along for the ride." I was sure he had it all figured out.

Pat guided the boat past Governors Island. Over toward Liberty Island a big commotion was going on, small craft gathering in the area. Pat ignored that, concentrating on threading through the tangle of harbor traffic—ferryboats, oil barges, tankers, freighters, lone tugs, hopper barges sagging with piled coal bound for the power plants. I was glad he was at the wheel. We were bouncing from the wake of passing craft. Pat kept busy on the horn. It seemed a little ludicrous when, with a brave beep beep, he answered the deep-throated double growl of a huge passenger liner being nudged toward a North River berth by an entourage of tugs. It was like a kitten growling back at a lion. But thanks to Pat I had a sketchy grounding in the rules of the road. I knew the liner and the *Barbara Ann* were exchanging intentions to pass starboard to starboard.

I got my first good look at the entire Staten Island waterfront that day. I found it what Pat told me to expect, a conglomeration of boat yards, shipyards, oil refineries, soap and other factories, old railroad facilities of all kinds, marinas, piers, yacht clubs. There were tug bases, dredging outfits, one big container terminal at Howland Hook; old ferry racks and houses, stretches of beach where the rotting wooden barge hulks lay half buried in the soft mud. We slid down Arthur Kill, edging along toward Tottenville. We got a full dose of the heavy industrial fumes blowing in from New Jersey, smelling vaguely of metals and chemicals. Wherever there were barges, Pat used the glasses, and three or four times we swung in close to shore so Pat could look it over more nearly.

Along the way Pat rambled on about old man Pareto.

"After a while he brought a couple of Dobermans in, real mean cusses, and let them run loose at night. He claimed equipment was being stolen at night and the dogs would discourage any more midnight raids. In that district you needed a car. It ran from the 69th Street pier clear around to Mill Basin. It was a good idea when you drove onto his property to stay in your car until you were sure the dogs weren't loose. He got quite attached to those dogs. He didn't feed them much, and wasn't gentle with them. He whipped them, too, made sure he kept them thin and half-starved

and nasty. They weren't pets, but he liked them, and they liked him and knew who was boss. He had a sense of humor about them. He called them Fido and Rover. My own names for them were Wolf and Tiger. Daytime he kept them chained up near the little shack up near the street end that he used for an office. They'd carry on something fierce when anyone came near.

"Pareto had a couple of small tugs. He used them mainly to push the old boats around with, but he didn't turn down any outside tow jobs that came his way. Like I say, he'd do anything to make a buck. He had a nephew working with him at that time, his sister's boy, an orphan he'd raised when the boy's parents burned to death in a fire. Pareto had no kids of his own. The nephew was a young lad but very handy around engines, any kind of machinery, as a matter of fact. He went to work for his uncle right out of high school. He was a good-looking boy, good size and build, curly hair, nice smile, nice personality, very friendly and accommodating. A couple of times he helped me with small repairs on my car.

"Pareto picked up the tugs for next to nothing, maybe nothing. He didn't believe in paying for anything if there was any way he could get it for free. His nephew tinkered with the tugs and got them into running shape. The kid was a crackerjack, a mechanical genius. He should have been going to a good engineering school, learning the science behind what he had such a good practical grasp of, instead of fooling around as an apprentice water rat. But the kid, Joey was his name, Joey Ambs, liked what he was doing, and was making good money. Old man Pareto wasn't what you'd call a candidate for the poorhouse and he wasn't stingy with his nephew, paid him what he was worth. Besides, the kid felt obligated to the old man, thought the world of him, worked his butt off for him. Hell, he didn't even take time to wash up for lunch. He'd come into the shack and polish off his sandwiches without bothering to get the grease off his hands and face and go right back to work. A fine boy. It was a shame, a crime, what happened to him.

"Pareto himself was sociable enough, and likable, in his way. He didn't believe in making enemies if he could help it. With us he was always polite and soft-spoken. He had a saying he said he got from his grandfather: find a friend and lose an enemy. He always had a bottle of dago red in the refrigerator, and no matter what the time of day would offer a drink to the dockmaster or inspector

or whoever else came by on official business. In the summer he'd say, 'Cool off. Have a drink.' In the winter it'd be, 'It's cold. Have a little drink to warm up.' It was hard to refuse him, and none of us were devout teetotallers. He'd do you a favor, too, so long as it didn't cost him cash out of the pocket. Give you a couple of old tires, light fixtures, lumber, an auto part, things like that, or tell you where you could pick up what you wanted cheap. He aimed to keep on the right side of us. I'd come around and before I could say anything he'd ask, 'Am I doing okay? Everything all right?'

"He'd look worried until I told him from what I could see everything was okay, on the up and up, I wasn't about to plaster him with a violation. In those days, that's all we could routinely do, hand out departmental violations and get the violator in for a hearing and try to convince him he ought to behave. No teeth at all in our enforcement. It was a joke then, a waste of time. The worst we could hit him with amounted to no more than a slap on the wrist. Along about 1970 they finally put some clout in it, summonses answerable in Criminal Court."

Pat stopped suddenly as the radio started crackling. He got on and talked back and forth for a few minutes. I was too busy wrestling with the boat, which was pitching violently, to hear all of what was said but I caught enough of it to ask Pat, when he signed off, "They found the *John B*, didn't they?"

"They said they did," Pat said.

"What do we do now? Head for home?"

"Not so fast," Pat said. "They found a deck scow—light, unloaded—tied up to McArdle's stake boat, over near the Statue. It has the name *John B* on it. They aren't so sure now."

"You think it's not the *John B*?"

"It may seem to be, but I'm inclined to doubt it is. There are two simple ways to check it out."

"Such as?"

"First, I think they'll find the name freshly painted on, maybe smeared with a little dirt to fake weathering. Second, they won't find copper fragments all over the deck. Copper ingots shed flakes and pieces easily—enough copper to make it worthwhile to sweep the deck to salvage the metal. I advised them to check those two things before they swallowed the bait."

"So we keep on going?"

"Yep. Looking for the real *John B.*, and the copper—which couldn't have been unloaded so fast anyhow because each of those ninety-pound ingots has to be handled separately, by hand," Pat said.

Without a hitch, he was back on Pareto.

"Anyhow, old man Pareto didn't want to have any trouble with the authorities. He was close-mouthed about some of his earlier activities, but the word was that back in the twenties he was a bootlegger and got picked up on a couple of charges. Speaking of bootleggers, see that stretch of beach over there, with that little creek in the center? That's Lemon Creek. I'll bet you never heard of it, never knew it existed. It's navigable quite a ways up, for small boats, but nothing as big as a barge. The bridge across it is the oldest in the city, well over a hundred years old. Good clam beds there, too, offshore, before the water got polluted. During Prohibition, Lemon Creek was a favorite spot for sneaking in the wet stuff. There, Gravesend Bay, Coney Island, a few other places. That was just a little bit before my time. The old timers told me many a tall tale when I was a young man new on the job. They knew what was going on, all the spots the rum runners were working and what boats were used and where the boats were hidden away, but they kept their mouths shut about it all. They had to. The rum runners in those days were a rough lot. . . . We can cross off Staten Island. We'll know the real McCoy when we see it, and there's nothing there we can't account for."

"Speak for yourself, Pat," I said. "I'm still in the dark on where you can hide a barge loaded with copper."

Pat gave me a smile.

"Just think about it."

We had lunch crossing the bay, en route to Brooklyn and a sweep around to Queens. By the time we hit Brooklyn, near Dyker Heights, we were through eating. Harbor installations were scarce until we got to Bay Parkway. Pat closely examined the scows at the concrete-batching operation there and we moved on, past a fishing boat pier and a lumber yard. A little farther along Pat had me reduce speed and hover offshore while he studied the situation at a fill job.

"Nothing doing here," Pat said, and we pushed on.

"As I say," he continued, "Pareto was quite a character. His

operation kept going. His new-made land ran over a quarter mile out from shore and must have been over two hundred feet wide. He had bulldozers in there; levelling things off. He kept shifting the barges around, moving those that would still float farther out as the inner fill was completed. Joey was keeping his tugs in tip top shape, and a workboat or two that could shift the barges in a pinch. He also had a good-sized floating derrick equipped with a bucket that he used for topping off with sand any spots he thought needed a different kind of surface. He had the sand brought in on a deck scow—one of his own, of course. He probably swapped equipment or services for the sand. I never could quite understand why he used the sand. His explanation was that there was ash in some of the fill—people were still burning coal in those days—and he topped the ash with sand before bulldozing to keep the dust from blowing around and to keep the people who lived in the neighborhood from complaining. I personally hadn't noticed any ash, but then I was away for six or more months at a stretch, so I had to accept his explanation."

We had reached Coney Island Creek, and Pat interrupted his story to take the wheel. The water there was shoal in many spots and navigation was tricky. The creek smelled to high heaven, just as it always had, as far back as I could remember. It's a toss-up among Coney Island Creek, Gowanus Canal, and Newtown Creek as to which smells worst.

"You never know what's going on here," Pat said. "A lot of squatters live here."

A concrete plant stood near where the creek joined the bay. Pat gave the scows there a good look, then steered past a small marina, a fishing boat station, a lumber yard, a manufacturing plant of some kind. The banks of the creek were an ooze of evil looking, stinking black mud. The sad remnants of old boats of all kinds were buried in the mud, ribs and rotting planks sticking out.

"We've seen enough," Pat said. "Nothing that big could get any farther up."

We sped past Coney Island, the broad sandy beach deserted at that time of year. A few fishermen were trying their luck at the Steeplechase pier, hoping for ling and whiting, maybe getting a few skate. As Coney, Brighton, Manhattan, and Oriental Beaches fell behind us, Pat talked some more about Pareto.

"The old man had connections everywhere. He was active in politics, made the right contributions, went to the right dinners. He had an in with the bigwigs at Tammany Hall, and Borough Hall, too. He also had ties with what you might call some of the more unsavory elements."

"The Mafia?" I asked.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say he belonged to the Mafia. I'm sure he had occasion to eat a little pasta and drink a little red with some underworld people from time to time. He was more on the fringes, just happened to know them, brush up against them. The waterfront is one of the few places where losers with records can find a spot. But they're entitled to another chance—that's how I look at it."

We approached the narrow entrance to Sheepshead Bay and I asked, "You going to do the bay?" I knew there were barges there, places where barges could tie up.

"No," he said. "But be careful. Keep a sharp watch. The fishing boats should be coming in along about now, and some of them don't slow up."

He was right. A couple of good-sized fishing boats, rails lined with fishermen burdened with their poles and other gear, came barreling past us, their horns tooting as they angled into the bay.

We pushed into Shellbank Creek. Pat searched out and inspected all the scows, shaking his head after checking each one.

The afternoon was wearing away. I asked Pat if he thought we'd have time to get to the Queens line and back to Lacey's before dark.

"Keep going," he answered. "If we run a little late, it won't matter. If you're leery of skippering at night, I'll take the boat back."

We continued on toward Queens. Pat was still going on about Pareto.

"I returned to the district after an absence of six months. The fill job was almost finished. Pareto was regretful in some ways to see it coming to an end. He'd made a pile just on the dumping fees. But construction of new one- and two-family houses had begun in the area, and it was only a question of time before some developer approached him on the sale of the land. Of course good building practice calls for a waiting period to allow for proper settling before

construction can begin on filled land, and then for the houses to be built on pile-supported foundations. Back then, though, they hadn't tightened up on that—it took the Ford Basin fiasco where those fancy waterfront houses sank, some so much you could drive a car up to your second story window, because the fill never got a chance to settle and they skipped the piles. Anyhow, Pareto would soon begin getting offers, if he hadn't already.

"He figured to be a very wealthy man—even wealthier than before, wealthy enough to buy himself a Caribbean Island and charge the gulls a feeding fee. He was at least close to a millionaire all along, though you'd never guess it to hear him talk, and from the way he dressed and his tightness with money. He took one vacation, the only one I can remember, in Florida. He came back after four days. The thought of paying all that money for a hotel room, a place to sleep, shook him so much he couldn't enjoy himself. But the biggest tragedy was Joey. It was a shame, a terrible waste of brains, when Pareto didn't see to it that Joey got the best education money could buy. Joey was a good boy, but he had to go along with what his uncle wanted, and he didn't have any idea what he might be letting himself in for.

Pat paused for a moment or two to tell me to swing into the next inlet. He found some interesting spots there but nothing came of them.

"Well," Pat went on, "back in the district, it wasn't long before I got clued in that something peculiar was going on at Pareto's place. A guy named Malasi, who'd begun developing a small boat basin just a few hundred yards up the line, tipped me off to keep an eye on the place. He wouldn't tell me why, and what little he did tell me was in confidence. I had to swear I wouldn't repeat it and get him involved. I guess he trusted me. I knew him from the days he ran a boat for Crespin's Launch Service. So in my own quiet way I kept a watch on Pareto's place. I did notice something out of the ordinary. A scow, with sand on the deck, and a covered barge, an old Penn Railroad job, kept getting shifted around together. The covered barge was positioned offshore. I noticed, too, that one of the tugs was always tied up to the covered barge. I didn't bring any of this up to Pareto, didn't want him to get any idea I was suspicious. I just saw what I saw and kept it all under my hat . . ."

Suddenly he stopped talking. His glasses were focused on a fill operation near the mouth of the inlet.

"Hold up," he said, "so I can see better."

I stopped the boat.

"Have a look for yourself," he handed me the glasses, "and tell me what you think."

I adjusted the glasses for my eyes and found myself gazing at a pretty good-sized fill operation. Several deck scows, some steel, some wooden, all loaded with sand, were tied up alongside a string of steel-hulled scows that formed a retaining wall. A small floating hoist was busy dumping bucketloads of sand inside the wall. There were two small tugs on the scene, one tied up close to the shore, the other alongside one of the sand scows.

"Well, what do you see?" Pat said.

"Not the *John B.*," I said. "Looks like a dozen other spots we checked out."

"Naturally," Pat said, "you don't see the *John B.* That's because what you see, if you believe your eyes, is *The Bonny Belle*. . . . Go in a little closer." He took the glasses from me. "I want to get in near enough that there can't be any doubt."

I pulled in closer. Pat got on the radio. I knew he was calling the police launches and helicopters that had been birdogging us all day.

"Stand by," Pat said into the mike. "We're going in for a good look."

"Someone else wants a good look, too," I said. A launch was scurrying toward us from the work site.

"That's the baby," Pat said, ignoring it. "*The Bonny Belle*, till recently the *John B.* It's riding too low in the water for the quantity of sand it seems to be loaded with. The name's been painted over. There are tarpaulins spread over the copper, and a heap of sand over the tarps. It's the old Pareto dodge in reverse."

I didn't know what that was and at the moment wasn't much interested in finding out. The launch had come alongside us, swaying with the wave motion. Two men were aboard. One was a big young dude, wearing a leather jacket, a peaked cap, and an unfriendly expression on his face. The other was an older man with curly hair, maybe in his late forties, the spitting image of the younger one. A father and son team for sure.

Pat had turned his attention to them at last.

"I'll be damned," he said to me, under his breath. "I should have guessed it."

The younger man challenged us. "You lost or something?"

"Just cruising," Pat said mildly, his voice almost drowned out by the whip of the blade as the police helicopter dipped down and hovered almost directly overhead. "Am I doing something wrong?"

I stood there doing what I do best, looking stern. I was ready for anything. My fingers in my coat pocket gripped my .38.

"You got no business here. Beat it. Cruise somewhere else," the young guy said.

The older man just stood there, staring at Pat. We could all hear the sound of screaming sirens coming from the patrol cars racing along the shore road toward the dump. And the harbor police launch had just rounded the bend into the inlet and was coming our way, wide open.

There was no conviction in the young one's voice. All the starch was gone out of him. The older guy just went on standing there. Pat nodded to him, briefly.

"Sorry to bother you. We were just going," he said to them. He took the wheel and turned the *Barbara Ann* around. "We can go home, Phil. We'd only be in the way. This is strictly a police matter now, and they have it well in hand. They're coming by land, sea, and air."

On the way back to Lacey's we relaxed and talked.

"What did you mean by the Pareto dodge in reverse?" I asked.

"You'll see when I finish the story," Pat said. "One morning I was driving down the road toward Pareto's dump. It was a mild day and I had my window open. I noticed a peculiar sweet but pungent smell, not strong but distinctive. At the same time, I saw this black car parked in the grass off the road's shoulder. There were two men in the car and they were looking toward Pareto's place. I stopped to talk to them, find out who they were, what they were doing, something I always did. I figured I ought to know who they were—it was part of my job to know everything going on in my district—and that I might be able to help them."

But they didn't want my company or my help. They identified themselves—they were federal agents, Treasury, the old Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms Division—and shooed me off and asked me to make myself scarce around Pareto's that day. I obliged. The way they asked was not a request. Later that day a big raiding party swooped down and nailed the operation shut. They had to shoot the dogs, who somehow got loose. Strange to say, the old man grieved for the dogs more than he did for Joey, who took the rap. Old man Pareto had set it up so that on paper Joey was the principal in the company. I'm sure Joey signed so many papers after a while he didn't bother reading them. Of course Joey was not entirely innocent. He had to know what was going on, not that he could have done anything to stop it even if he wanted to. Joey did time. He dropped out of sight when he got out. I lost track of him."

"A still. They were running a still," I said.

"Right," Pat said. "On the covered barge. They kept the tug tied up to the barge, ready to beat it the hell out of there in a hurry, if they thought they had to. Believe it or not, those two federal men just happened to be driving by when they caught a whiff of the mash. If the wind hadn't chanced to be blowing strong in the right direction, Pareto might never have been caught. Smart operators don't try to keep a still going indefinitely. A few weeks of uninterrupted operation is all it takes to make a big haul, all the time they really want, or expect. And the way it's set up—Pareto wasn't in this alone—the big boys never get caught anyhow. There's always a fall guy, a patsy, some underling, all lined up to take the rap. Joey was the patsy."

"How were they working it?" I asked.

"Very simple. At dusk a normal looking truck, with what looked like an ordinary load of dirt, would pull in. It would be the last truck in before the dump shut down for the day. The real load was bags of sugar, covered by tarpaulins, with a little dirt on top of the canvas to make it look legitimate. The same truck would drive out empty in the morning, as if it had just dumped a load of fill. Overnight the bags of sugar were unloaded onto the covered barge. The sugar was used to make the alcohol. The tug, besides being handy for a quick getaway, supplied the electricity for cooking the stuff. The barge was kept offshore so no one not in the know could get close enough to it to figure the deal out. The sand scow was just

a buffer. Malasi later told me he'd guessed at what was going on when he noticed the last truck in every day didn't leave, and he saw that Pareto was suddenly doing a brisk business in drums, which he was using to ship the alcohol out in. Then, Malasi's place was nearby, and sooner or later he was bound to get enough of a whiff to confirm his suspicions. Nowadays it's not that easy to pick up a still just by smell. They have masking chemicals that can control that."

"What became of Pareto?" I asked.

"After Joey went to jail for him," Pat said, "none of us wanted any part of him. We kept it strictly business, and leaned on him hard as we could. His own relatives shunned him, had no use for him. He moved his junk operation to Westchester Creek in the Bronx after he sold the land. But he couldn't escape what he'd done. Word of it followed him around. He was ostracized. He started to fail physically. Maybe the full impact of the horrible thing he'd done, the way he'd ruined that boy, took a little time to sink in. After a few months, he quit the business. Within a year he was dead."

"Couldn't have happened to a nicer guy," I said.

"By the way," Pat said, "you'll get credit for cracking this case. I told my police acquaintances up there I was giving a friend the use of my boat. You shouldn't have any trouble collecting your fee."

"It really belongs to you," I said. "You figured out the answer, with the help of your long memory."

"Sad to say, I wasn't the only one with a long memory," Pat said. "That older man in the launch was Joey Ambs, popped up out of nowhere after all these years, looking to make a big score. Quite a surprise for both of us. Did you notice the look on his face? But maybe not such a surprise, his turning up this way, when you start thinking about it."

We were back at Lacey's. I took care of tying up. "If it weren't for you," I said, "he would have gotten away with it. And I still feel funny about my fee. What can I do for you with part of it?"

"Well," Pat said, checking to see how I'd done with the lines, "after you've made your phone calls and bought me a good Italian dinner at Zambino's up the street, we'll go shopping for some new curtains, on you." I couldn't argue with any of that.

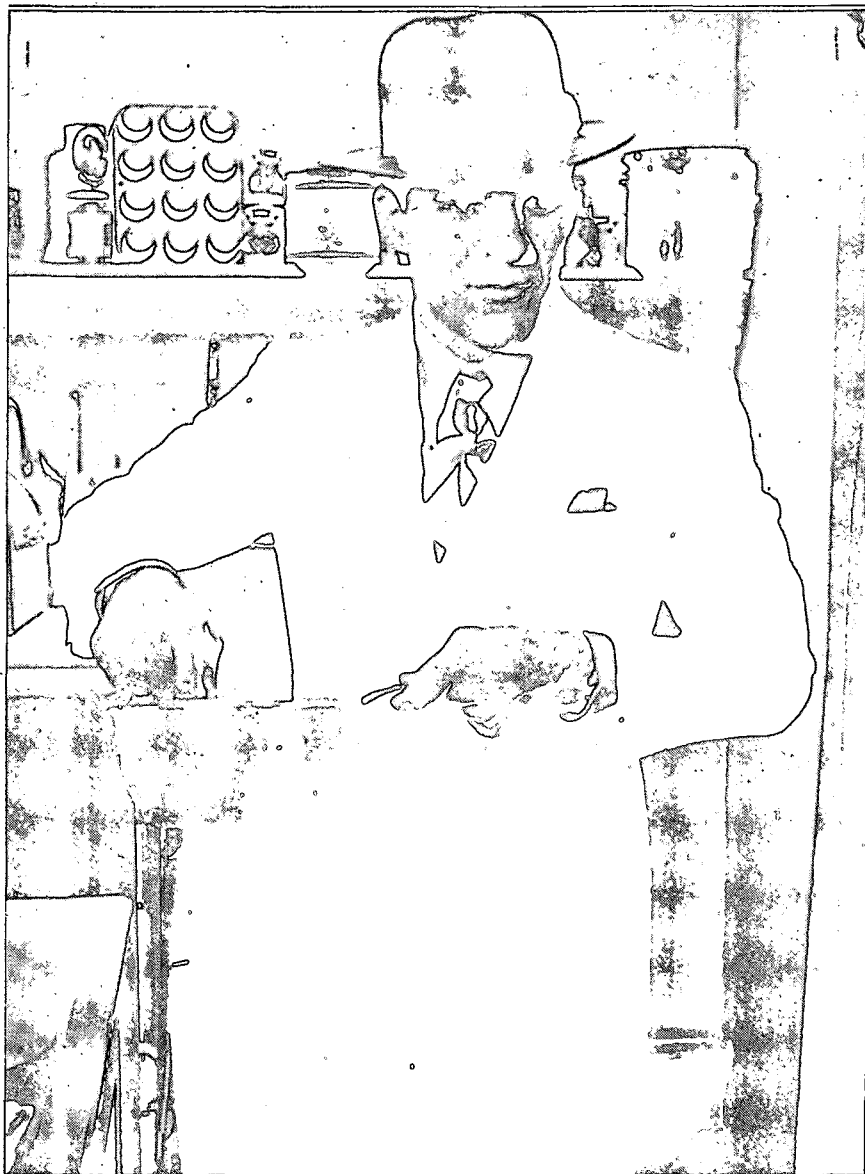
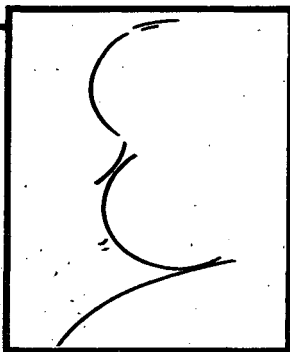


Photo by Stephen Vaughan. Copyright © 1982 Universal City Studios, Inc.

Steve Martin in Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid.

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



If ever there was a movie specially made for nostalgia buffs hooked on the adventure, detective, and mystery films of the 1940's, **Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid** is it. In fact, much of the footage consists of familiar scenes cut out of famous movies and cleverly worked into the plot.

The title gives a good idea of the kind of fun being had by writer-director Carl Reiner (he also plays a bit part as a Nazi) and Steve Martin, who is credited as a writer and who plays the role of Rigby Reardon, private eye. Martin is supposed to have been given the cryptic advice that dead men don't wear plaid by Philip Marlowe-Humphrey Bogart, appearing here

in three clips. The line has the authentic ring of an old fashioned tough guy aphorism, but the joke is that it obviously doesn't mean anything at all.

Technically, the clips are inserted smoothly in the action. Martin, for instance, may walk into a room followed by a shot of, say, Ray Milland suffering from withdrawal symptoms in *The Lost Weekend*, seen as if over Martin's shoulder. Then it's back to Martin for a plausible line and back to Milland for another, a funny one in the context.

It isn't necessary, by the way, to be an expert capable of recognizing the old stars and their movies. At the end, a set of stills identifies them all: Alan

Ladd, Barbara Stanwyck, Kirk Douglas, Ava Gardner, James Cagney, Joan Crawford; and *The Big Sleep*, Alfred Hitchcock's *Suspicion* and *Notorious*, *Double Indemnity*, and *White Heat*, to name only a few of each. This fan also spotted Brian Donlevy.

From the movie's opening use of the old-time spinning globe of Universal Pictures, to the grainy black and white photography, to the sets, there's a continuous feeling of authenticity. Steve Martin's one-man detective agency office looks right; so does the hair oil in his medicine cabinet. His voice-over narration has the right flatness of tone, and above all, the English fashion model and actress Rachel Ward, who asks Martin to investigate the death of her father, is a luscious compendium of all the mysteriously beautiful women of the period (most of whom appear on the screen before us by the end of the movie).

There is a suitably complicated and unfollowable plot, as in *The Maltese Falcon*. Plenty of Mickey Finns are slipped to, and plenty of beatings performed on, the hero—and, of course, after each pummeling he wakes up with the correct

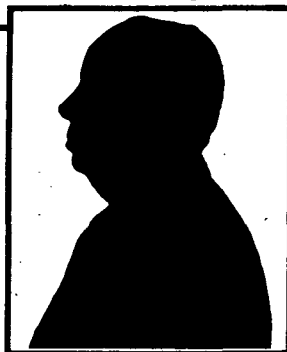
five o'clock shadow and a wondrous capacity to leap back into the fray. There are also the right kinds of scenes in old cars, trains complete with a Hitchcock blackout while going through a tunnel, nightclubs, cheap dives, and a South American city—the latter deep into a plot-resolving fiesta.

Unfortunately, not all the humor is so wittily and lovingly pointed toward old movies. When the action moves to "Grunion Point," which a few will recognize as a reference to the suicidal California fish, one feels the script beginning to strain for a laugh. The Hotel Guano, à la *Dr. Strangelove*, signals desperation: the usage simply isn't witty here. Neither are other scatological jokes nor the frequent sexual horseplay. It's too bad that these are in such poor taste as well as being out of place, for otherwise the movie would have made a convenient introduction to the detective genre for teenagers.

Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid could have done with a little more restraint and a little more respect for its models. But as long as no one can make mystery movies like they used to, why not use the old movies themselves?

FRAMES OF REFERENCE

by Peter Christian



The twisting path through the wood, almost obscured by tangled undergrowth, leads to the ruins of Manderley, the first image we see in the rich 1940 film of Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca*. Du Maurier's director on that occasion was Alfred Hitchcock, but he did not have her complete approval. His last venture the previous year had been *Jamaica Inn*, and she was dismayed by the liberties he had taken with her novel. (It was not completely Hitchcock's fault. He had never been comfortable with costume dramas, and the lordly Charles Laughton as the local squire, suspected of leading a band of cutthroats by a girl staying at an English coastal inn, insisted on changes and improvisations.)

Because *Rebecca* was Hitchcock's first American film—although there could hardly be a more British subject—he approached it very carefully. Manderley itself, for instance, was actually three detailed miniatures of differing sizes, the largest nearly covering a sound stage, for Hitchcock wanted to photograph the mansion in a variety of moods: sunny and welcoming, grim and imposing, shadowy and rain-lashed, and finally dying in flames. And because of Du Maurier's objections to *Jamaica Inn*, he stayed very close to her story. The heroine was acted by Joan Fontaine, who received an Academy Award nomination for her performance. Laurence Olivier was enlisted to play Maxim de Winter, the brooding aristocrat whose new marriage cannot quiet the ghost of his dead first wife. And in

the end, *Rebecca* was given the Oscar for Best Picture of the Year.

Hitchcock tackled Du Maurier one more time, in 1963—she was the only author from whom he adapted three different properties. In *The Birds*, however, he was far from faithful to his source, changing the setting of the short story from Cornwall to the rocky coast above San Francisco, and changing the characters as well.

In 1952, in the meantime, Nunnally Johnson had produced and written the adaptation of *My Cousin Rachel*, Du Maurier's cheerless drama of a young man (Richard Burton) who falls in love with the mysterious widow of an elder cousin she is suspected of murdering. Olivia de Havilland portrays Rachel, and the mood is tragic. Is she a scheming killer? Or has she been misjudged, and does she truly love the bewildered Burton? The answers are enigmatic.

The screen version of Du Maurier's *The Scapegoat*, in 1959, was no less ambiguous. On a motor holiday in France, an English teacher meets his exact double, a debauched French count (both roles are played by Alec Guinness). They dine together, and the tutor is drugged by his host, who exchanges clothes with him and vanishes. Our hero decides to adopt the masquerade the clothes provide and, as the count, is chauffeured to "his" estate. The family there is exceedingly odd: a neurotic wife who thinks he is trying to kill her, a daughter obsessed with religious martyrdom, a bedridden drug addict of a mother. Only his Italian mistress seems normal. Then his wife dies, and talk of murder arises. He is in an awkward, dangerous position—even more so at the climax when tutor and aristocrat meet once again. Does a man assuming another's identity take on his sins and burdens, Du Maurier seems to ask—and leaves the audience to answer.

In 1973, Nicholas Roeg brilliantly brought to the screen *Don't Look Now*, from another Du Maurier short story. The setting is Venice during a gray winter. An English architect and his wife, mourning the death of their small daughter, encounter there a blind woman psychic claiming to have "seen" the dead child; nearby, the dark waters of the Venetian canals yield several victims of a mysterious mad slayer. The ending of the film is truly unnerving. Although it is as deep and murky as the canals themselves, *Don't Look Now* is the most satisfying Du Maurier film treatment in three decades.

The Du Maurier mood—at times forbidding and oppressive—has been difficult to translate to the screen. But we have been lucky: we can dream of the ruins of Manderley and the twisting back alleys of Venice with the courageous creative artists who captured it.

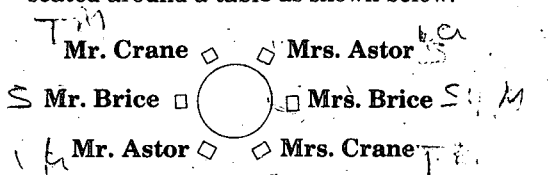
UNSOLVED

by George J. Summers

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the September issue.

Mr. and Mrs. Astor, Mr. and Mrs. Brice, and Mr. and Mrs. Crane were seated around a table as shown below.



At the table:

1. Exactly three people sat next to at least one murderer. *2*
2. Exactly four people sat next to at least one extortionist.
3. Exactly five people sat next to at least one swindler.
4. Six people sat next to at least one thief.

Of the types of crime:

5. No two types of crime were committed by more than one person.
6. One person committed more

types of crime than each of the other persons.

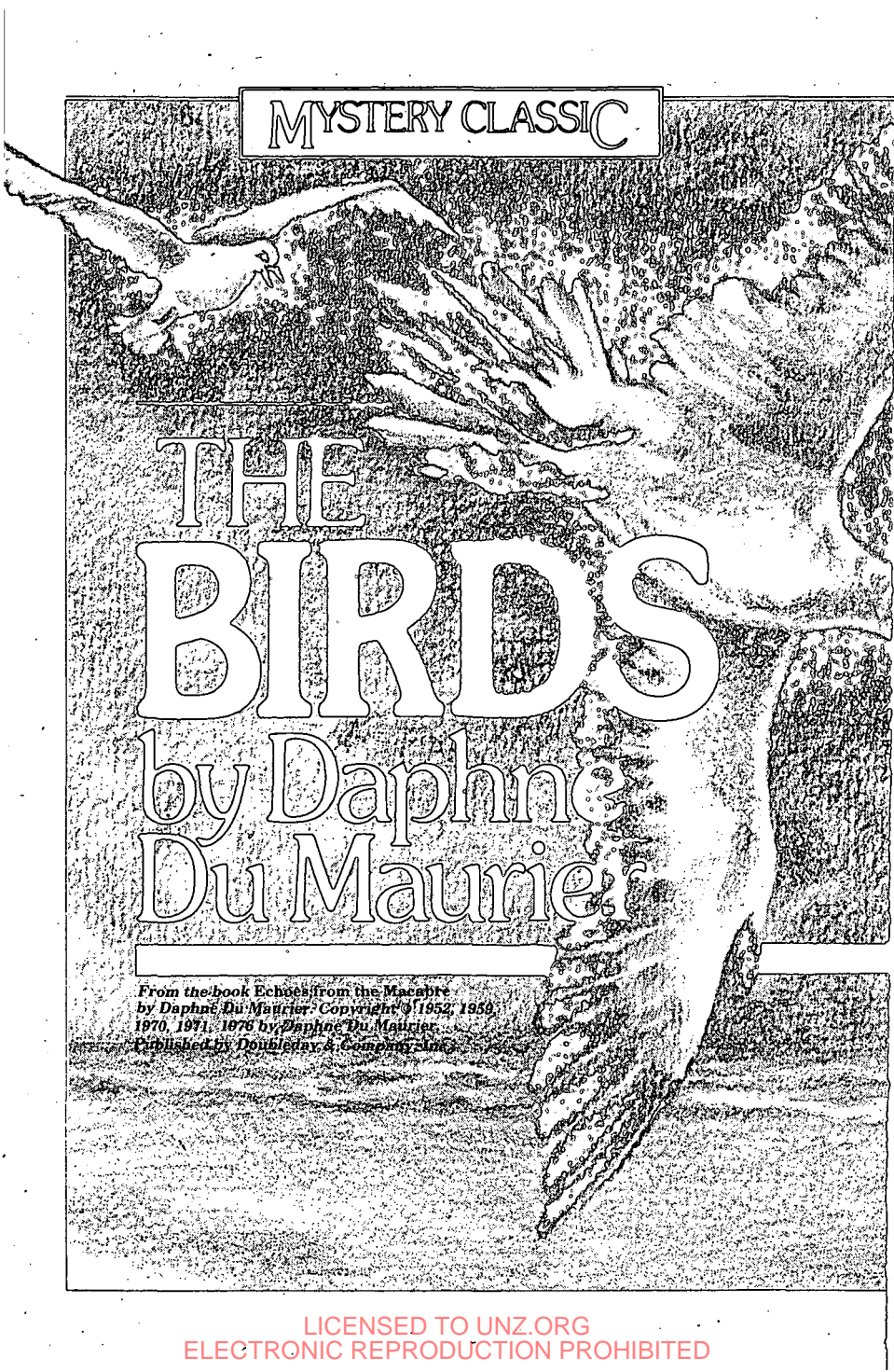
Of the people:

7. Mr. and Mrs. Astor each committed exactly one type of crime, though not the same type.
8. Mr. and Mrs. Brice were both swindlers.
9. Mr. and Mrs. Crane were both thieves.
10. More women than men were swindlers.

Who committed more types of crime than each of the other persons?

HINT: Determine separately the possible seating arrangements of the murderers, of the extortionists, of the swindlers, and of the thieves. Then determine the number of persons who committed four types of crime, just three types of crime, just two types of crime, and just one type of crime. Finally determine the specific types of crime committed by each person.

"More Types of Crime," taken from Test Your Logic by George J. Summers,
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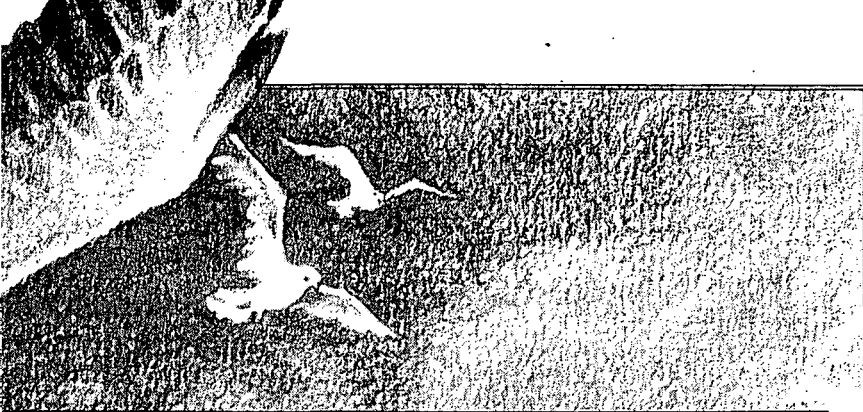


MYSTERY CLASSIC

THE BIRDS

by Daphne
Du Maurier

From the book *Echoes from the Macabre*
by Daphne Du Maurier. Copyright © 1952, 1959,
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Published by Doubleday & Company, Inc.



On December the third the wind changed overnight and it was winter. Until then the autumn had been mellow, soft. The leaves had lingered on the trees, golden red, and the hedgerows were still green. The earth was rich where the plough had turned it.

Nat Hocken, because of a wartime disability, had a pension and did not work full-time at the farm. He worked three days a week, and they gave him the lighter jobs: hedging, thatching, repairs to the farm buildings.

Although he was married, with children, his was a solitary disposition; he liked best to work alone. It pleased him when he was given a bank to build up, or a gate to mend at the far end of





Illustration by Trudi Smith

the peninsula, where the sea surrounded the farm land on either side. Then, at midday, he would pause and eat the pasty that his wife had baked for him, and sitting on the cliff's edge would watch the birds. Autumn was best for this, better than spring. In spring the birds flew inland, purposeful, intent; they knew where they were bound, the rhythm and ritual of their life brooked no delay. In autumn those that had not migrated overseas but remained to pass the winter were caught up in the same driving urge, but because migration was denied them followed a pattern of their own. Great flocks of them came to the peninsula, restless, uneasy, spending themselves in motion; now wheeling, circling in the sky, now settling to feed on the rich new-turned soil, but even when they fed it was as though they did so without hunger, without desire. Restlessness drove them to the skies again.

Black and white, jackdaw and gull, mingled in strange partnership, seeking some sort of liberation, never satisfied, never still. Flocks of starlings, rustling like silk, flew to fresh pasture, driven by the same necessity of movement, and the smaller birds, the finches and the larks, scattered from tree to hedge as if compelled.

Nat watched them, and he watched the sea birds, too. Down in

The tapping at the window came again, more forceful, more insistent.

the bay they waited for the tide. They had more patience. Oystercatchers, redshank, sanderling and curlew watched by the water's edge; as the slow sea sucked at the shore and then withdrew, leaving the strip of seaweed bare and the shingle churned, the sea birds raced and ran upon the beaches. Then that same impulse to flight seized upon them, too. Crying, whistling, calling, they skimmed the placid sea and left the shore. Make haste, make speed, hurry and begone; yet where, and to what purpose? The restless urge of autumn, unsatisfying, sad, had put a spell upon them and they must flock, and wheel, and cry; they must spill themselves of motion before winter came.

Perhaps, thought Nat, munching his pasty by the cliff's edge, a message comes to the birds in autumn, like a warning. Winter is coming. Many of them perish. And like people who, apprehensive of death before their time, drive themselves to work or folly, the birds do likewise.

The birds had been more restless than ever this fall of the year, the agitation more marked because the days were still. As the tractor traced its path up and down the western hills, the figure of the farmer silhouetted on the driving seat, the whole machine and the man upon it would be lost momentarily in the great cloud of wheeling, crying birds. There were many more than usual, Nat was sure of this. Always, in autumn, they followed the plough, but not in great flocks like these, nor with such clamor.

Nat remarked upon it, when hedging was finished for the day. "Yes," said the farmer, "there are more birds about than usual; I've noticed it, too. And daring, some of them, taking no notice of the tractor. One or two gulls came so close to my head this afternoon I thought they'd knock my cap off! As it was, I could scarcely see what I was doing, when they were overhead and I had the sun in my eyes. I have a notion the weather will change. It will be a hard winter. That's why the birds are restless."

Nat, tramping home across the fields and down the lane to his cottage, saw the birds still flocking over the western hills, in the last glow of the sun. No wind, and the grey sea calm and full. Campion in bloom yet in the hedges, and the air mild. The farmer was right, though, and it was that night the weather turned. Nat's bedroom faced east. He woke just after two and heard the wind in the chimney. Not the storm and bluster of a sou'westerly gale, bringing the rain, but east wind, cold and dry. It sounded hollow in the chimney, and a loose slate rattled on the roof. Nat listened, and he could hear the sea roaring in the bay. Even the air in the small bedroom had turned chill: a draught came under the skirting of the door, blowing upon the bed. Nat drew the blanket round him, leant closer to the back of his sleeping wife, and stayed wakeful, watchful, aware of misgiving without cause.

Then he heard the tapping on the window. There was no creeper on the cottage walls to break loose and scratch upon the pane. He listened, and the tapping continued until, irritated by the sound, Nat got out of bed and went to the window. He opened it, and as he did so something brushed his hand, jabbing at his knuckles, grazing the skin. Then he saw the flutter of the wings and it was

gone, over the roof, behind the cottage.

It was a bird, what kind of bird he could not tell. The wind must have driven it to shelter on the sill.

He shut the window and went back to bed, but feeling his knuckles wet put his mouth to the scratch. The bird had drawn blood. Frightened, he supposed, and bewildered, the bird, seeking shelter, had stabbed at him in the darkness. Once more he settled himself to sleep.

Presently the tapping came again, this time more forceful, more insistent, and now his wife woke at the sound, and turning in the bed said to him, "See to the window, Nat, it's rattling."

"I've already seen to it," he told her, "there's some bird there, trying to get in. Can't you hear the wind? It's blowing from the east, driving the birds to shelter."

"Send them away," she said. "I can't sleep with that noise."

He went to the window for the second time, and now when he opened it there was not one bird upon the sill but half a dozen; they flew straight into his face, attacking him.

He shouted, striking out at them with his arms, scattering them; like the first one, they flew over the roof and disappeared. Quickly he let the window fall and latched it.

"Did you hear that?" he said. "They went for me. Tried to peck my eyes." He stood by the window, peering into the darkness, and could see nothing. His wife, heavy with sleep, murmured from the bed.

"I'm not making it up," he said, angry at her suggestion. "I tell you the birds were on the sill, trying to get into the room."

Suddenly a frightened cry came from the room across the passage where the children slept.

"It's Jill," said his wife, roused at the sound, sitting up in bed. "Go to her, see what's the matter."

Nat lit the candle, but when he opened the bedroom door to cross the passage the draught blew out the flame.

There came a second cry of terror, this time from both children, and stumbling into their room he felt the beating of wings about him in the darkness. The window was wide open. Through it came the birds, hitting first the ceiling and the walls, then swerving in midflight, turning to the children in their beds.

"It's all right, I'm here," shouted Nat, and the children flung themselves, screaming, upon him, while in the darkness the birds rose and dived and came for him again.

"What is it, Nat, what's happened?" his wife called from the farther bedroom, and swiftly he pushed the children through the door to the passage and shut it upon them, so that he was alone now, in their bedroom, with the birds.

He seized a blanket from the nearest bed, and using it as a weapon flung it to right and left about him in the air. He felt the thud of bodies, heard the fluttering of wings, but they were not yet defeated, for again and again they returned to the assault, jabbing his hands, his head, the little stabbing beaks sharp as a pointed fork. The blanket became a weapon of defense; he wound it about his head, and then in greater darkness beat at the birds with his bare hands. He dared not stumble to the door and open it, lest in doing so the birds should follow him.

How long he fought with them in the darkness he could not tell, but at last the beating of the wings about him lessened and then withdrew, and through the density of the blanket he was aware of light. He waited, listened; there was no sound except the fretful crying of one of the children from the bedroom beyond. The fluttering, the whirring of the wings had ceased.

He took the blanket from his head and stared about him. The cold grey morning light exposed the room. Dawn, and the open window, had called the living birds; the dead lay on the floor. Nat gazed at the little corpses, shocked and horrified. They were all small birds, none of any size; there must have been fifty of them lying there upon the floor. There were robins, finches, sparrows, blue tits, larks and bramblings, birds that by nature's law kept to their own flock and their own territory, and now, joining one with another in their urge for battle, had destroyed themselves against the bedroom walls, or in the strife had been destroyed by him. Some had lost feathers in the fight, others had blood, his blood, upon their beaks.

Sickened, Nat went to the window and stared out across his patch of garden to the fields.

It was bitter cold, and the ground had all the hard black look of frost. Not white frost, to shine in the morning sun, but the black frost that the east wind brings. The sea, fiercer now with the turning tide, whitecapped and steep, broke harshly in the bay. Of the birds there was no sign. Not a sparrow chattered in the hedge beyond the garden gate, no early missel-thrush or blackbird pecked on the grass for worms. There was no sound at all but the east wind and the sea.

Nat shut the window and the door of the small bedroom, and went back across the passage to his own. His wife sat up in bed, one child asleep beside her, the smaller in her arms, his face bandaged. The curtains were tightly drawn across the window, the candles lit. Her face looked garish in the yellow light. She shook her head for silence.

"He's sleeping now," she whispered, "but only just. Something must have cut him, there was blood at the corner of his eyes. Jill said it was the birds. She said she woke up, and the birds were in the room."

His wife looked up at Nat, searching his face for confirmation. She looked terrified, bewildered, and he did not want her to know that he was also shaken, dazed almost, by the events of the past few hours.

"There are birds in there," he said, "dead birds, nearly fifty of them. Robins, wrens, all the little birds from hereabouts. It's as though madness seized them, with the east wind." He sat down on the bed beside his wife, and held her hand. "It's the weather," he said, "it must be that, it's the hard weather. They aren't the birds, maybe, from here around. They've been driven down, from up country."

"But Nat," whispered his wife, "it's only this night that the weather turned. There's been no snow to drive them. And they can't be hungry yet. There's food for them, out there, in the fields."

"It's the weather," repeated Nat. "I tell you, it's the weather."

His face too was drawn and tired, like hers. They stared at one another for a while without speaking.

"I'll go downstairs and make a cup of tea," he said.

The sight of the kitchen reassured him. The cups and saucers, neatly stacked upon the dresser, the table and chairs, his wife's roll of knitting on her basket chair, the children's toys in a corner cupboard.

He knelt down, raked out the old embers and relit the fire. The glowing sticks brought normality, the steaming kettle and the brown teapot comfort and security. He drank his tea, carried a cup to his wife. Then he washed in the scullery, and, putting on his boots, opened the back door.

The sky was hard and leaden, and the brown hills that had gleamed in the sun the day before looked dark and bare. The east wind, like a razor, stripped the trees, and the leaves, crackling and dry, shivered and scattered with the wind's blast. Nat stubbed the

earth with his boot. It was frozen hard. He had never known a change so swift and sudden. Black winter had descended in a single night.

The children were awake now. Jill was chattering upstairs and young Johnny crying once again. Nat heard his wife's voice, soothing, comforting. Presently they came down. He had breakfast ready for them, and the routine of the day began.

"Did you drive away the birds?" asked Jill, restored to calm because of the kitchen fire, because of day, because of breakfast.

"Yes, they've all gone now," said Nat. "It was the east wind brought them in. They were frightened and lost. They wanted shelter."

"They tried to peck us," said Jill. "They went for Johnny's eyes."

"Fright made them do that," said Nat. "They didn't know where they were, in the dark bedroom."

"I hope they won't come again," said Jill. "Perhaps if we put bread for them outside the window they will eat that and fly away."

She finished her breakfast and then went for her coat and hood, her school books and her satchel. Nat said nothing, but his wife looked at him across the table. A silent message passed between them.

"I'll walk with her to the bus," he said. "I don't go to the farm today."

And while the child was washing in the scullery he said to his wife, "Keep all the windows closed, and the doors, too. Just to be on the safe side. I'll go to the farm. Find out if they heard anything in the night." Then he walked with his small daughter up the lane. She seemed to have forgotten her experience of the night before. She danced ahead of him, chasing the leaves, her face whipped with the cold and rosy under the pixie hood.

"Is it going to snow, Dad?" she said. "It's cold enough."

He glanced up at the bleak sky, felt the wind tear at his shoulders.

"No," he said, "it's not going to snow. This is a black winter, not a white one."

All the while he searched the hedgerows for the birds, glanced over the top of them to the fields beyond, looked to the small wood above the farm where the rooks and jackdaws gathered. He saw none.

The other children waited by the bus stop, muffled, hooded like Jill, the faces white and pinched with cold.

Jill ran to them, waving. "My dad says it won't snow," she called, "it's going to be a black winter."

She said nothing of the birds. She began to push and struggle with another little girl. The bus came ambling up the hill. Nat saw her on it, then turned and walked back towards the farm. It was not his day for work, but he wanted to satisfy himself that all was well: Jim, the cowman, was clattering in the yard.

"Boss around?" asked Nat.

"Gone to market," said Jim. "It's Tuesday, isn't it?"

He clumped off round the corner of a shed. He had no time for Nat. Nat was said to be superior. Read books, and the like. Nat had forgotten it was Tuesday. This showed how the events of the preceding night had shaken him. He went to the back door of the farmhouse and heard Mrs. Trigg singing in the kitchen, the wireless making a background to her song.

"Are you there, missus?" called out Nat.

She came to the door, beaming, broad, a good-tempered woman.

"Hullo, Mr. Hocken," she said. "Can you tell me where this cold is coming from? Is it Russia? I've never seen such a change. And it's going on, the wireless says. Something to do with the Arctic Circle."

"We didn't turn on the wireless this morning," said Nat. "Fact is, we had trouble in the night."

"Kiddies poorly?"

"No . . ." He hardly knew how to explain it. Now, in daylight, the battle of the birds would sound absurd.

He tried to tell Mrs. Trigg what had happened, but he could see from her eyes that she thought his story was the result of a nightmare.

"Sure they were real birds," she said, smiling, "with proper feathers and all? Not the funny-shaped kind, that the men see after closing hours on a Saturday night?"

"Mrs. Trigg," he said, "there are fifty dead birds, robins, wrens, and such, lying low on the floor of the children's bedroom. They went for me; they tried to go for young Johnny's eyes."

Mrs. Trigg stared at him doubtfully.

"Well there, now," she answered, "I suppose the weather brought them. Once in the bedroom, they wouldn't know where they were to. Foreign birds maybe, from that Arctic Circle."

"No," said Nat, "they were the birds you see about here every day."

"Funny thing," said Mrs. Trigg, "no explaining it, really. You ought to write up and ask the *Guardian*. They'd have some answer for it. Well, I must be getting on."

She nodded, smiled; and went back into the kitchen.

Nat, dissatisfied, turned to the farm gate. Had it not been for those corpses on the bedroom floor, which he must now collect and bury somewhere, he would have considered the tale exaggeration, too.

Jim was standing by the gate.

"Had any trouble with the birds?" asked Nat.

"Birds? What birds?"

"We got them up our place last night. Scores of them, came in the children's bedroom. Quite savage they were."

"Oh?" It took time for anything to penetrate Jim's head. "Never heard of birds acting savage," he said at length. "They get tame, like, sometimes. I've seen them come to the windows, for crumbs."

"These birds last night weren't tame."

"No? Cold maybe. Hungry. You put out some crumbs."

Jim was no more interested than Mrs. Trigg had been. It was, Nat thought, like air raids in the war. No one down this end of the country knew what the Plymouth folk had seen and suffered. You had to endure something yourself before it touched you. He walked back along the lane and crossed the stile to his cottage. He found his wife in the kitchen with young Johnny.

"See anyone?" she asked.

"Mrs. Trigg and Jim," he answered. "I don't think they believed me. Anyway, nothing wrong up there."

"You might take the birds away," she said. "I daren't go into the room to make the beds until you do. I'm scared."

"Nothing to scare you now," said Nat. "They're dead, aren't they?"

He went up with a sack and dropped the stiff bodies into it, one by one. Yes, there were fifty of them, all told. Just the ordinary common birds of the hedgerow, nothing as large even as a thrush. It must have been fright that made them act the way they did. Blue tits, wrens, it was incredible to think of the power of their small beaks, jabbing at his face and hands the night before. He took the sack out into the garden and was faced now with a fresh problem. The ground was too hard to dig. It was frozen solid, yet no snow had fallen, nothing had happened in the past hours but the coming of the east wind. It was unnatural, queer. The weather

prophets must be right. The change was something connected with the Arctic Circle.

The wind seemed to cut him to the bone as he stood there, uncertainly, holding the sack. He could see the whitecapped seas breaking down under in the bay. He decided to take the birds to the shore and bury them.

When he reached the beach below the headland he could scarcely stand, the force of the east wind was so strong. It hurt to draw breath, and his bare hands were blue. Never had he known such cold, not in all the bad winters he could remember. It was low tide. He crunched his way over the shingle to the softer sand and then, his back to the wind, ground a pit in the sand with his heel. He meant to drop the birds into it, but as he opened up the sack the force of the wind carried them, lifted them, as though in flight again, and they were blown away from him along the beach, tossed like feathers, spread and scattered, the bodies of the fifty frozen birds. There was something ugly in the sight. He did not like it. The dead birds were swept away from him by the wind.

"The tide will take them when it turns," he said to himself.

He looked out to sea and watched the crested breakers, combing green. They rose stiffly, curled, and broke again, and because it was ebb tide the roar was distant, more remote, lacking the sound and thunder of the flood.

Then he saw them. The gulls. Out there, riding the seas.

What he had thought at first to be the whitecaps of the waves were gulls. Hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands . . . They rose and fell in the trough of the seas, heads to the wind, like a mighty fleet at anchor, waiting on the tide. To eastward, and to the west, the gulls were there. They stretched as far as his eye could reach, in close formation, line upon line. Had the sea been still they would have covered the bay like a white cloud, head to head, body packed to body. Only the east wind, whipping the sea to breakers, hid them from the shore.

Nat turned, and leaving the beach climbed the steep path home. Someone should know of this. Someone should be told. Something was happening, because of the east wind and the weather, that he did not understand. He wondered if he should go to the call box by the bus stop and ring up the police. Yet what could they do? What could anyone do? Tens of thousands of gulls riding the sea there, in the bay, because of storm, because of hunger. The police would think him mad, or drunk, or take the statement from him with

great calm. "Thank you. Yes, the matter has already been reported. The hard weather is driving the birds inland in great numbers." Nat looked about him. Still no sign of any other bird. Perhaps the cold had sent them all from up country? As he drew near to the cottage his wife came to meet him, at the door. She called to him, excited. "Nat," she said, "it's on the wireless. They've just read out a special news bulletin. I've written it down."

"What's on the wireless?" he said.

"About the birds," she said. "It's not only here, it's everywhere. In London, all over the country. Something has happened to the birds."

Together they went into the kitchen. He read the piece of paper lying on the table.

"Statement from the Home Office at eleven A.M. today. Reports from all over the country are coming in hourly about the vast quantity of birds flocking above towns, villages, and outlying districts, causing obstruction and damage and even attacking individuals. It is thought that the Arctic air stream, at present covering the British Isles, is causing birds to migrate south in immense numbers, and that intense hunger may drive these birds to attack human beings. Householders are warned to see to their windows, doors, and chimneys, and to take reasonable precautions for the safety of their children. A further statement will be issued later."

A kind of excitement seized Nat; he looked at his wife in triumph.

"There you are," he said, "let's hope they'll hear that at the farm. Mrs. Trigg will know it wasn't any story. It's true. All over the country. I've been telling myself all morning there's something wrong. And just now, down on the beach, I looked out to sea and there are gulls, thousands of them, tens of thousands, you couldn't put a pin between their heads, and they're all out there, riding on the sea, waiting."

"What are they waiting for, Nat?" she asked.

He stared at her, then looked down again at the piece of paper.

"I don't know," he said slowly. "It says here the birds are hungry."

He went over to the drawer where he kept his hammer and tools.

"What are you going to do, Nat?"

"See to the windows and the chimneys too, like they tell you."

"You think they would break in, with the windows shut? Those sparrows and robins and such? Why, how could they?"

He did not answer. He was not thinking of the robins and the sparrows. He was thinking of the gulls . . .

He went upstairs and worked there the rest of the morning, boarding the windows of the bedrooms, filling up the chimney bases. Good job it was his free day and he was not working at the farm. It reminded him of the old days, at the beginning of the war. He was not married then, and he had made all the blackout boards for his mother's house in Plymouth. Made the shelter too. Not that it had been of any use, when the moment came. He wondered if they would take these precautions up at the farm. He doubted it. Too easygoing, Harry Trigg and his missus. Maybe they'd laugh at the whole thing. Go off to a dance or a whist drive.

"Dinner's ready." She called him, from the kitchen.

"All right. Coming down."

He was pleased with his handiwork. The frames fitted nicely over the little panes and at the base of the chimneys.

When dinner was over and his wife was washing up, Nat switched on the one o'clock news. The same announcement was repeated, the one which she had taken down during the morning, but the news bulletin enlarged upon it. "The flocks of birds have caused dislocation in all areas," read the announcer, "and in London the sky was so dense at ten o'clock this morning that it seemed as if the city was covered by a vast black cloud.

"The birds settled on rooftops, on window ledges, and on chimneys. The species included blackbird, thrush, the common house sparrow, and, as might be expected in the metropolis, a vast quantity of pigeons and starlings, and that frequenter of the London river, the black-headed gull. The sight has been so unusual that traffic came to a standstill in many thoroughfares, work was abandoned in shops and offices, and the streets and pavements were crowded with people standing about to watch the birds."

Various incidents were recounted, the suspected reason of cold and hunger stated again, and warnings to householders repeated. The announcer's voice was smooth and suave. Nat had the impression that this man, in particular, treated the whole business as he would an elaborate joke. There would be others like him, hundreds of them, who did not know what it was to struggle in darkness with a flock of birds. There would be parties tonight in London, like the ones they gave on election nights. People standing about, shouting and laughing, getting drunk. "Come and watch the birds!"

Nat switched off the wireless. He got up and started work on the kitchen windows. His wife watched him, young Johnny at her heels.

"What boards for down here, too?" she said. "Why, I'll have to

light up before three o'clock. I see no call for boards down here."

"Better be sure than sorry," answered Nat. "I'm not going to take any chances."

"What they ought to do," she said, "is to call the army out and shoot the birds. That would soon scare them off."

"Let them try," said Nat. "How'd they set about it?"

"They have the army to the docks," she answered, "when the dockers strike. The soldiers go down and unload the ships."

"Yes," said Nat, "and the population of London is eight million or more. Think of all the buildings, all the flats, and houses. Do you think they've enough soldiers to go round shooting birds from every roof?"

"I don't know. But something should be done. They ought to do something."

Nat thought to himself that "they" were no doubt considering the problem at that very moment, but whatever "they" decided to do in London and the big cities would not help the people here, three hundred miles away. Each householder must look after his own.

"How are we off for food?" he said.

"Now, Nat, whatever next?"

"Never mind. What have you got in the larder?"

"It's shopping day tomorrow, you know that. I don't keep uncooked food hanging about, it goes off. Butcher doesn't call till the day after. But I can bring back something when I go in tomorrow."

Nat did not want to scare her. He thought it possible that she might not go to town tomorrow. He looked in the larder for himself, and in the cupboard where she kept her tins. They would do, for a couple of days. Bread was low.

"What about the baker?"

"He comes tomorrow, too."

He saw she had flour. If the baker did not call she had enough to bake one loaf.

"We'd be better off in the old days," he said, "when the women baked twice a week, and had pilchards salted, and there was food for a family to last a siege, if need be."

"I've tried the children with tinned fish, they don't like it," she said.

Nat went on hammering the boards across the kitchen windows. Candles. They were low in candles, too. That must be another thing she meant to buy tomorrow. Well, it could not be helped. They

must go early to bed tonight. That was, if . . .

He got up and went out of the back door and stood in the garden, looking down towards the sea. There had been no sun all day, and now, at barely three o'clock, a kind of darkness had already come, the sky sullen, heavy, colorless, like salt. He could hear the vicious sea drumming on the rocks. He walked down the path, halfway to the beach, and then he stopped. He could see the tide had turned. The rock that had shown in midmorning was now covered, but it was not the sea that held his eyes. The gulls had risen. They were circling, hundreds of them, thousands of them, lifting their wings against the wind. It was the gulls that made the darkening of the sky. And they were silent. They made not a sound. They just went on soaring and circling, rising, falling, trying their strength against the wind.

Nat turned. He ran up the path, back to the cottage.

"I'm going for Jill," he said. "I'll wait for her, at the bus stop."

"What's the matter?" asked his wife. "You've gone quite white."

"Keep Johnny inside," he said. "Keep the door shut. Light up now, and draw the curtains."

"It's only just gone three," she said.

"Never mind. Do what I tell you."

He looked inside the toolshed, outside the back door. Nothing there of much use. A spade was too heavy, and a fork no good. He took the hoe. It was the only possible tool, and light enough to carry.

He started walking up the lane to the bus stop, and now and again glanced back over his shoulder.

The gulls had risen higher now, their circles were broader, wider, they were spreading out in huge formation across the sky.

He hurried on; although he knew the bus would not come to the top of the hill before four o'clock he had to hurry. He passed no one on the way. He was glad of this. No time to stop and chatter.

At the top of the hill he waited. He was much too soon. There was half an hour still to go. The east wind came whipping across the fields from the higher ground. He stamped his feet and blew upon his hands. In the distance he could see the clay hills, white and clean, against the heavy pallor of the sky. Something black rose from behind them, like a smudge at first, then widening, becoming deeper, and the smudge became a cloud, and the cloud divided again into five other clouds, spreading north, east, south and west, and they were not clouds at all; they were birds. He

watched them travel across the sky, and as one section passed overhead, within two or three hundred feet of him, he knew, from their speed, they were bound inland, up country, they had no business with the people here on the peninsula. They were rooks, crows, jackdaws, magpies, jays, all birds that usually preyed upon the smaller species; but this afternoon they were bound on some other mission.

"They've been given the towns," thought Nat, "they know what they have to do. We don't matter so much here. The gulls will serve for us. The others go to the towns."

He went to the call box, stepped inside, and lifted the receiver. The exchange would do. They would pass the message on.

"I'm speaking from Highway," he said, "by the bus stop. I want to report large formations of birds travelling up country. The gulls are also forming in the bay."

"All right," answered the voice, laconic, weary.

"You'll be sure and pass this message on to the proper quarter?"

"Yes . . . yes . . ." Impatient now, fed up. The buzzing note resumed.

"She's another," thought Nat, "she doesn't care. Maybe she's had to answer calls all day. She hopes to go to the pictures tonight. She'll squeeze some fellow's hand, and point up at the sky, and say, 'Look at all them birds!' She doesn't care."

The bus came lumbering up the hill. Jill climbed out and three or four other children. The bus went on towards the town.

"What's the hoe for, Dad?"

They crowded around him, laughing, pointing.

"I just brought it along," he said. "Come on now, let's get home. It's cold, no hanging about. Here, you. I'll watch you across the fields, see how fast you can run."

He was speaking to Jill's companions, who came from different families, living in the council houses. A short cut would take them to the cottages.

"We want to play a bit in the lane," said one of them.

"No, you don't. You go off home, or I'll tell your mammy."

They whispered to one another, round-eyed, then scuttled off across the fields. Jill stared at her father, her mouth sullen.

"We always play in the lane," she said.

"Not tonight, you don't," he said. "Come on now, no dawdling."

He could see the gulls now, circling the fields, coming in towards the land. Still silent. Still no sound.

"Look, Dad, look over there, look at all the gulls."

"Yes. Hurry, now."

"Where are they flying to? Where are they going?"

"Up country, I dare say. Where it's warmer."

He seized her hand and dragged her after him along the lane.

"Don't go so fast. I can't keep up."

The gulls were copying the rooks and crows. They were spreading out in formation across the sky. They headed, in bands of thousands, to the four compass points.

"Dad, what is it? What are the gulls doing?"

They were not intent upon their flight, as the crows, as the jackdaws had been. They still circled overhead. Nor did they fly so high. It was as though they waited upon some signal. As though some decision had yet to be given. The order was not clear.

"Do you want me to carry you, Jill? Here, come pickaback."

This way he might put on speed; but he was wrong. Jill was heavy. She kept slipping. And she was crying, too. His sense of urgency, of fear, had communicated itself to the child.

"I wish the gulls would go away. I don't like them. They're coming closer to the lane."

He put her down again. He started running, swinging Jill after him. As they went past the farm turning he saw the farmer backing his car out of the garage. Nat called to him.

"Can you give us a lift?" he said.

"What's that?"

Mr. Trigg turned in the driving seat and stared at them. Then a smile came to his cheerful, rubicund face.

"It looks as though we're in for some fun," he said. "Have you seen the gulls? Jim and I are going to take a crack at them. Everyone's gone bird crazy, talking of nothing else. I hear you were troubled in the night. Want a gun?"

Nat shook his head.

The small car was packed. There was just room for Jill, if she crouched on top of petrol tins on the back seat.

"I don't want a gun," said Nat, "but I'd be obliged if you'd run Jill home. She's scared of the birds."

He spoke briefly. He did not want to talk in front of Jill.

"Okay," said the farmer, "I'll take her home. Why don't you stop behind and join the shooting match? We'll make the feathers fly."

Jill climbed in, and turning the car the driver sped up the lane. Nat followed after. Trigg must be crazy. What use was a gun

against a sky of birds?

Now Nat was not responsible for Jill he had time to look about him. The birds were circling still, above the fields. Mostly herring gull, but the black-backed gull amongst them. Usually they kept apart. Now they were united. Some bond had brought them together. It was the black-backed gull that attacked the smaller birds, and even newborn lambs, so he'd heard. He'd never seen it done. He remembered this now, though, looking above him in the sky. They were coming in towards the farm. They were circling lower in the sky, and the black-backed gulls were to the front, the black-backed gulls were leading. The farm, then, was their target. They were making for the farm.

Nat increased his pace towards his own cottage. He saw the farmer's car turn and come back along the lane. It drew up beside him with a jerk.

"The kid has run inside," said the farmer. "Your wife was watching for her. Well, what do you make of it? They're saying in town the Russians have done it. The Russians have poisoned the birds."

"How could they do that?" asked Nat.

"Don't ask me. You know how stories get around. Will you join my shooting match?"

"No, I'll get along home. The wife will be worried else."

"My missus says if you could eat gull, there'd be some sense in it," said Trigg, "we'd have roast gull, baked gull, and pickle 'em into the bargain. You wait until I let off a few barrels into the brutes. That'll scare 'em."

"Have you boarded your windows?" asked Nat.

"No. Lot of nonsense. They like to scare you on the wireless. I've had more to do today than to go round boarding up my windows."

"I'd board them now, if I were you."

"Garn. You're windy. Like to come to our place to sleep?"

"No, thanks all the same."

"All right. See you in the morning. Give you a gull breakfast."

The farmer grinned and turned his car to the farm entrance.

Nat hurried on. Past the little wood, past the old barn, and then across the stile to the remaining field.

As he jumped the stile he heard the whir of wings. A black-backed gull dived down at him from the sky, missed, swerved in flight, and rose to dive again. In a moment it was joined by others, six, seven, a dozen, black-backed and herring mixed. Nat dropped his hoe. The hoe was useless. Covering his head with his arms he

ran towards the cottage. They kept coming at him from the air, silent save for the beating wings. The terrible, fluttering wings. He could feel the blood on his hands, his wrists, his neck. Each stab of a swooping beak tore his flesh. If only he could keep them from his eyes. Nothing else mattered. He must keep them from his eyes. They had not learnt yet how to cling to a shoulder, how to rip clothing, how to dive in mass upon the head, upon the body. But with each dive, with each attack, they became bolder. And they had no thought for themselves. When they dived low and missed, they crashed, bruised and broken, on the ground. As Nat ran he stumbled, kicking their spent bodies in front of him.

He found the door, he hammered upon it with his bleeding hands. Because of the boarded windows no light shone. Everything was dark.

"Let me in," he shouted, "it's Nat. Let me in."

He shouted loud to make himself heard above the whirr of the gull's wings.

Then he saw the gannet, poised for the dive, above him in the sky. The gulls circled, retired, soared, one with another, against the wind. Only the gannet remained. One single gannet, above him in the sky. The wings folded suddenly to its body. It dropped, like a stone. Nat screamed, and the door opened. He stumbled across the threshold, and his wife threw her weight against the door.

They heard the thud of the gannet as it fell.

His wife dressed his wounds. They were not deep. The backs of his hands had suffered most, and his wrists. Had he not worn a cap they would have reached his head. As to the gannet . . . the gannet could have split his skull.

The children were crying, of course. They had seen the blood on their father's hands.

"It's all right now," he told them. "I'm not hurt. Just a few scratches. You play with Johnny, Jill. Mammy will wash these cuts."

He half-shut the door to the scullery, so that they could not see. His wife was ashen. She began running water from the sink.

"I saw them overhead," she whispered. "They began collecting just as Jill ran in with Mr. Trigg. I shut the door fast, and it jammed. That's why I couldn't open it at once, when you came."

"Thank God they waited for me," he said. "Jill would have fallen

at once. One bird alone would have done it."

Furtively, so as not to alarm the children, they whispered together, as she bandaged his hands and the back of his neck.

"They're flying inland," he said, "thousands of them. Rooks, crows, all the bigger birds. I saw them from the bus stop. They're making for the towns."

"But what can they do, Nat?"

"They'll attack. Go for everyone out in the streets. Then they'll try the windows, the chimneys."

"Why don't the authorities do something? Why don't they get the army, get machine guns, anything?"

"There's been no time. Nobody's prepared. We'll hear what they have to say on the six o'clock news."

Nat went back into the kitchen, followed by his wife. Johnny was playing quietly on the floor. Only Jill looked anxious.

"I can hear the birds," she said. "Listen, Dad."

Nat listened. Muffled sounds came from the windows, from the door. Wings brushing the surface, sliding, scraping, seeking a way of entry. The sound of many bodies, pressed together, shuffling on the sills. Now and again came a thud, a crash, as some bird dived and fell. "Some of them will kill themselves that way," he thought, "but not enough. Never enough."

"All right," he said aloud. "I've got boards over the windows, Jill. The birds can't get in."

He went and examined all the windows. His work had been thorough. Every gap was closed. He would make extra certain, however. He found wedges, pieces of old tin, strips of wood and metal and fastened them at the sides to reinforce the boards. His hammering helped to deafen the sound of the birds, the shuffling, the tapping, and more ominous—he did not want his wife or the children to hear it—the splinter of cracked glass.

"Turn on the wireless," he said, "let's have the wireless."

This would drown the sound also. He went upstairs to the bedrooms and reinforced the windows there. Now he could hear the birds on the roof, the scraping of claws, a sliding, jostling sound.

He decided they must sleep in the kitchen, keep up the fire, bring down the mattresses and lay them out on the floor. He was afraid of the bedroom chimneys. The boards he had placed at the chimney bases might give way. In the kitchen they would be safe, because of the fire. He would have to make a joke of it. Pretend to the children they were playing at camp. If the worst happened, and the

birds forced an entry down the bedroom chimneys, it would be hours, days perhaps, before they could break down the doors. The birds would be imprisoned in the bedrooms. They could do no harm there. Crowded together, they would stifle and die.

He began to bring the mattresses downstairs. At sight of them his wife's eyes widened in apprehension. She thought the birds had already broken in upstairs.

"All right," he said cheerfully, "we'll all sleep together in the kitchen tonight. More cosy here by the fire. Then we shan't be worried by those silly old birds tapping at the windows."

He made the children help him rearrange the furniture, and he took the precaution of moving the dresser, with his wife's help, across the window. It fitted well. It was an added safeguard. The mattresses could now be laid, one beside the other, against the wall where the dresser had stood.

"We're safe enough now," he thought, "we're snug and tight, like an air-raid shelter. We can hold out. It's just the food that worries me. Food and coal for the fire. We've enough for two or three days, not more. By that time . . ."

No use thinking ahead as far as that. And they'd be giving directions on the wireless. People would be told what to do. And now, in the midst of many problems, he realized that it was dance music only coming over the air. Not "Children's Hour," as it should have been. He glanced at the dial. Yes, they were on the Home Service all right. Dance records. He switched to the Light programme. He knew the reason. The usual programmes had been abandoned. This only happened at exceptional times. Elections, and such. He tried to remember if it had happened in the war, during the heavy raids on London. But of course. The B.B.C. was not stationed in London during the war. The programmes were broadcast from other, temporary quarters. "We're better off here," he thought, "we're better off here in the kitchen, with the windows and the doors boarded, than they are up in the towns. Thank God we're not in the towns."

At six o'clock the records ceased. The time signal was given. No matter if it scared the children, he must hear the news. There was a pause after the pips. Then the announcer spoke. His voice was solemn, grave. Quite different from midday.

"This is London," he said. "A National Emergency was proclaimed at four o'clock this afternoon. Measures are being taken to safeguard the lives and property of the population, but it must be understood that these are not easy to effect immediately, owing

to the unforeseen and unparalleled nature of the present crisis. Every householder must take precautions to his own building, and where several people live together, as in flats and apartments, they must unite to do the utmost they can to prevent entry. It is absolutely imperative that every individual stays indoors tonight, and that no one at all remains on the streets, or roads, or anywhere without doors. The birds, in vast numbers, are attacking anyone on sight, and have already begun an assault upon buildings; but these, with due care, should be impenetrable. The population is asked to remain calm, and not to panic. Owing to the exceptional nature of the emergency, there will be no further transmission from any broadcasting station until seven A.M. tomorrow."

They played the National Anthem. Nothing more happened. Nat switched off the set. He looked at his wife. She stared back at him.

"What's it mean?" said Jill. "What did the news say?"

"There won't be any more programmes tonight," said Nat. "There's been a breakdown at the B.B.C."

"Is it the birds?" asked Jill. "Have the birds done it?"

"No," said Nat, "it's just that everyone's very busy, and then of course they have to get rid of the birds, messing everything up, in the towns. Well, we can manage without the wireless for one evening."

"I wish we had a gramophone," said Jill. "That would be better than nothing."

She had her face turned to the dresser, backed against the windows. Try as they did to ignore it, they were all aware of the shuffling, the stabbing, the persistent beating and sweeping of wings.

"We'll have supper early," suggested Nat, "something like a treat. Ask Mammy. Toasted cheese, eh? Something we all like?"

He winked and nodded at his wife. He wanted the look of dread, of apprehension to go from Jill's face.

He helped with the supper, whistling, singing, making as much clatter as he could, and it seemed to him that the shuffling and the tapping were not so intense as they had been at first. Presently he went up to the bedrooms and listened, and he no longer heard the jostling for place upon the roof.

"They've got reasoning powers," he thought, "they know it's hard to break in here. They'll try elsewhere. They won't waste their time with us."

Supper passed without incident, and then, when they were clear-

ing away, they heard a new sound, droning, familiar, a sound they all knew and understood.

His wife looked up at him, her face alight. "It's planes," she said, "they're sending out planes after the birds. That's what I said they ought to do, all along. That will get them. Isn't that gunfire? Can't you hear guns?"

It might be gunfire, out at sea. Nat could not tell. Big naval guns might have an effect upon the gulls out at sea, but the gulls were inland now. The guns couldn't shell the shore, because of the population.

"It's good, isn't it," said his wife, "to hear the planes?" And Jill, catching her enthusiasm, jumped up and down with Johnny. "The planes will get the birds. The planes will shoot them."

Just then they heard a crash two miles distant, followed by a second, then a third. The droning became more distant, passed away out to sea.

"What was that?" asked his wife. "Were they dropping bombs on the birds?"

"I don't know," answered Nat. "I don't think so."

He did not want to tell her that the sound they had heard was the crashing of aircraft. It was, he had no doubt, a venture on the part of the authorities to send out reconnaissance forces, but they might have known the venture was suicidal. What could aircraft do against birds that flung themselves to death against propeller and fuselage but hurtle to the ground themselves? This was being tried now, he supposed, over the whole country. And at a cost. Someone high up has lost his head.

"Where have the planes gone, Dad?" asked Jill.

"Back to base," he said. "Come on, now, time to tuck down for bed."

It kept his wife occupied, undressing the children before the fire, seeing to the bedding, one thing and another, while he went round the cottage again, making sure that nothing had worked loose. There was no further drone of aircraft, and the naval guns had ceased. "Waste of life and effort," Nat said to himself. "We can't destroy enough of them that way. Cost too heavy. There's always gas. Maybe they'll try spraying with gas, mustard gas. We'll be warned first, of course, if they do. There's one thing, the best brains of the country will be on to it tonight."

Somehow the thought reassured him. He had a picture of scientists, naturalists, technicians, and all those chaps they called

the backroom boys, summoned to a council; they'd be working on the problem now. This was not a job for the government, for the chiefs of staff—they would merely carry out the orders of the scientists.

"They'll have to be ruthless," he thought. "Where the trouble's worst they'll have to risk more lives, if they use gas. All the live-stock, too, and the soil—all contaminated. As long as everyone doesn't panic. That's the trouble. People panicking, losing their heads. The B.B.C. was right to warn us of that."

Upstairs in the bedrooms all was quiet. No further scraping and stabbing at the windows. A lull in battle. Forces regrouping. Wasn't that what they called it, in the old wartime bulletins? The wind hadn't stopped, though. He could still hear it, roaring in the chimneys. And the sea breaking down on the shore. Then he remembered the tide. The tide would be on the turn. Maybe the lull in battle was because of the tide. There was some law the birds obeyed, and it was all to do with the east wind and the tide.

He glanced at his watch. Nearly eight o'clock. It must have gone high water an hour ago. That explained the lull: the birds attacked with the flood tide. It might not work that way inland, up country, but it seemed as if it was so this way on the coast. He reckoned the time limit in his head. They had six hours to go, without attack. When the tide turned again, around one twenty in the morning, the birds would come back. . . .

There were two things he could do. The first, to rest, with his wife and children, and all of them snatch what sleep they could, until the small hours. The second, to go out, see how they were faring at the farm, see if the telephone was still working there, so that they might get news from the exchange.

He called softly to his wife, who had just settled the children. She came halfway up the stairs and he whispered to her.

"You're not to go," she said at once, "you're not to go and leave me alone with the children. I can't stand it."

Her voice rose hysterically. He hushed her, calmed her.

"All right," he said, "all right. I'll wait till morning. And we'll get the wireless bulletin then too, at seven. But in the morning, when the tide ebbs again, I'll try for the farm, and they may let us have bread and potatoes, and milk, too."

His mind was busy again, planning against emergency. They would not have milked, of course, this evening. The cows would be standing by the gate, waiting in the yard, with the household

inside, battened behind boards, as they were here at the cottage. That is, if they had had time to take precautions. He thought of the farmer, Trigg, smiling at him from the car. There would have been no shooting party, not tonight.

The children were asleep. His wife, still clothed, was sitting on her mattress. She watched him, her eyes nervous.

"What are you going to do?" she whispered.

He shook his head for silence. Softly, stealthily, he opened the back door and looked outside.

It was pitch dark. The wind was blowing harder than ever, coming in steady gusts, icy, from the sea. He kicked at the step outside the door. It was heaped with birds. There were dead birds everywhere. Under the windows, against the walls. These were the suicides, the divers, the ones with broken necks. Wherever he looked he saw dead birds. No trace of the living. The living had flown seaward with the turn of the tide. The gulls would be riding the seas now, as they had done in the forenoon.

In the far distance, on the hill where the tractor had been two days before, something was burning. One of the aircraft that had crashed; the fire, fanned by the wind, had set light to a stack.

He looked at the bodies of the birds, and he had a notion that if he heaped them, one upon the other, on the window sills they would make added protection for the next attack. Not much, perhaps, but something. The bodies would have to be clawed at, pecked, and dragged aside, before the living birds gained purchase on the sills and attacked the panes. He set to work in the darkness. It was queer; he hated touching them. The bodies were still warm and bloody. The blood matted their feathers. He felt his stomach turn, but he went on with his work. He noticed, grimly, that every windowpane was shattered. Only the boards had kept the birds from breaking in. He stuffed the cracked panes with the bleeding bodies of the birds.

When he had finished he went back into the cottage. He barricaded the kitchen door, made it doubly secure. He took off his bandages, sticky with the birds' blood, not with his own cuts, and put on fresh plaster.

His wife had made him cocoa and he drank it thirstily. He was very tired.

"All right," he said, smiling, "don't worry. We'll get through."

He lay down on his mattress and closed his eyes. He slept at once. He dreamt uneasily, because through his dreams there ran

a thread of something forgotten. Some piece of work, neglected, that he should have done. Some precaution that he had known well but had not taken, and he could not put a name to it in his dreams. It was connected in some way with the burning aircraft and the stack upon the hill. He went on sleeping, though; he did not awake. It was his wife shaking his shoulder that awoke him finally.

"They've begun," she sobbed, "they've started this last hour, I can't listen to it any longer, alone. There's something smelling bad, too, something burning."

Then he remembered. He had forgotten to make up the fire. It was smouldering, nearly out. He got up swiftly and lit the lamp. The hammering had started at the windows and the doors, but it was not that he minded now. It was the smell of singed feathers. The smell filled the kitchen. He knew at once what it was. The birds were coming down the chimney, squeezing their way down to the kitchen range.

He got sticks and paper and put them on the embers, then reached for the can of paraffin.

"Stand back," he shouted to his wife, "we've got to risk this."

He threw the paraffin onto the fire. The flame roared up the pipe, and down upon the fire fell the scorched, blackened bodies of the birds.

The children woke, crying. "What is it?" said Jill. "What's happened?"

Nat had no time to answer. He was raking the bodies from the chimney, clawing them out onto the floor. The flames still roared, and the danger of the chimney catching fire was one he had to take. The flames would send away the living birds from the chimney top. The lower joint was the difficulty, though. This was choked with the smouldering helpless bodies of the birds caught by fire. He scarcely heeded the attack on the windows and the door: let them beat their wings, break their beaks, lose their lives, in the attempt to force an entry into his home. They would not break in. He thanked God he had one of the old cottages, with small windows, stout walls. Not like the new council houses. Heaven help them up the lane, in the new council houses.

"Stop crying," he called to the children. "There's nothing to be afraid of, stop crying."

He went on raking at the burning, smouldering bodies as they fell into the fire.

"This'll fetch them," he said to himself, "the draught and the

flames together. We're all right, as long as the chimney doesn't catch. I ought to be shot for this. It's all my fault. Last thing I should have made up the fire. I knew there was something."

Amid the scratching and tearing at the window boards came the sudden homely striking of the kitchen clock. Three A.M. A little more than four hours yet to go. He could not be sure of the exact time of high water. He reckoned it would not turn much before half past seven, twenty to eight.

"Light up the Primus," he said to his wife. "Make us some tea, and the kids some cocoa. No use sitting around doing nothing."

That was the line. Keep her busy, and the children, too. Move about, eat, drink; always best to be on the go.

He waited by the range. The flames were dying. But no more blackened bodies fell from the chimney. He thrust his poker up as far as it could go and found nothing. It was clear. The chimney was clear. He wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"Come on now, Jill," he said, "bring me some more sticks. We'll have a good fire going directly," She wouldn't come near him, though. She was staring at the heaped singed bodies of the birds.

"Never mind them," he said, "we'll put those in the passage when I've got the fire steady."

The danger of the chimney was over. It could not happen again, not if the fire was kept burning day and night.

"I'll have to get more fuel from the farm tomorrow," he thought. "This will never last. I'll manage, though. I can do all that with the ebb tide. It can be worked, fetching what we need, when the tide's turned. We've just got to adapt ourselves, that's all."

They drank tea and cocoa and ate slices of bread and Bovril. Only half a loaf left, Nat noticed. Never mind, though, they'd get by.

"Stop it," said young Johnny, pointing to the windows with his spoon, "stop it, you old birds."

"That's right," said Nat, smiling, "we don't want the old beggars, do we? Had enough of 'em."

They began to cheer when they heard the thud of the suicide birds.

"There's another, Dad," cried Jill, "he's done for."

"He's had it," said Nat, "there he goes, the blighter."

This was the way to face up to it. This was the spirit. If they could keep this up, hang on like this until seven, when the first news bulletin came through, they would not have done too badly.

"Give us a fag," he said to his wife. "A bit of a smoke will clear away the smell of the scorched feathers."

"There's only two left in the packet," she said. "I was going to buy you some from the Co-op."

"I'll have one," he said. "The other will keep for a rainy day."

No sense trying to make the children rest. There was no rest to be got while the tapping and the scratching went on at the windows. He sat with one arm round his wife and the other round Jill, with Johnny on his mother's lap and the blankets heaped about them on the mattress.

"You can't help admiring the beggars," he said, "they've got persistence. You'd think they'd tire of the game, but not a bit of it."

Admiration was hard to sustain. The tapping went on and on and a new rasping note struck Nat's ear, as though a sharper beak than any hitherto had come to take over from its fellows. He tried to remember the names of birds, he tried to think which species would go for this particular job. It was not the tap of the woodpecker. That would be light and frequent. This was more serious, because if it continued long the wood would splinter as the glass had done. Then he remembered the hawks. Could the hawks have taken over from the gulls? Were there buzzards now upon the sills, using talons as well as beaks? Hawks, buzzards, kestrels, falcons—he had forgotten the birds of prey. He had forgotten the gripping power of the birds of prey. Three hours to go, and while they waited, the sound of the splintering wood, the talons tearing at the wood.

Nat looked about him, seeing what furniture he could destroy to fortify the door. The windows were safe, because of the dresser. He was not certain of the door. He went upstairs, but when he reached the landing he paused and listened. There was a soft patter on the floor of the children's bedroom. The birds had broken through . . . He put his ear to the door. No mistake. He could hear the rustle of wings, and the light patter as they searched the floor. The other bedroom was still clear. He went into it and began bringing out the furniture, to pile at the head of the stairs should the door of the children's bedroom go. It was a preparation. It might never be needed. He could not stack the furniture against the door, because it opened inward. The only possible thing was to have it at the top of the stairs.

"Come down, Nat, what are you doing?" called his wife.

"I won't be long," he shouted. "Just making everything shipshape up here."

He did not want her to come; he did not want her to hear the pattering of the feet in the children's bedroom, the brushing of those wings against the door.

At five thirty he suggested breakfast, bacon and fried bread, if only to stop the growing look of panic in his wife's eyes and to calm the fretful children. She did not know about the birds upstairs. The bedroom, luckily, was not over the kitchen. Had it been so she could not have failed to hear the sound of them, up there, tapping the boards. And the silly, senseless thud of the suicide birds, the death and glory boys, who flew into the bedroom, smashing their heads against the walls. He knew them of old, the herring gulls. They had no brains. The black-backs were different, they knew what they were doing. So did the buzzards, the hawks. . . .

He found himself watching the clock, gazing at the hands that went so slowly round the dial. If his theory was not correct, if the attack did not cease with the turn of the tide, he knew they were beaten. They could not continue through the long day without air, without rest, without more fuel, without . . . his mind raced. He knew there were so many things they needed to withstand siege. They were not fully prepared. They were not ready. It might be that it would be safer in the towns after all. If he could get a message through, on the farm telephone, to his cousin, only a short journey by train up country, they might be able to hire a car. That would be quicker—hire a car between tides . . .

His wife's voice, calling his name, drove away the sudden; desperate desire for sleep.

"What is it? What now?" he said sharply.

"The wireless," said his wife. "I've been watching the clock. It's nearly seven."

"Don't twist the knob," he said, impatient for the first time, "it's on the Home where it is. They'll speak from the Home."

They waited. The kitchen clock struck seven. There was no sound. No chimes, no music. They waited until a quarter past, switching to the Light. The result was the same. No news bulletin came through.

"We've heard wrong," he said. "They won't be broadcasting until eight o'clock."

They left it switched on, and Nat thought of the battery, wondered how much power was left in it. It was generally recharged

when his wife went shopping in the town. If the battery failed they would not hear the instructions.

"It's getting light," whispered his wife. "I can't see it, but I can feel it. And the birds aren't hammering so loud."

She was right. The rasping, tearing sound grew fainter every moment. So did the shuffling, the jostling for place upon the step, upon the sills. The tide was on the turn. By eight there was no sound at all. Only the wind. The children, lulled at last by the stillness, fell asleep. At half past eight Nat switched the wireless off.

"What are you doing? We'll miss the news," said his wife.

"There isn't going to be any news," said Nat. "We've got to depend upon ourselves."

He went to the door and slowly pulled away the barricades. He drew the bolts, and kicking the bodies from the step outside the door breathed the cold air. He had six working hours before him, and he knew he must reserve his strength for the right things, not waste it in any way. Food, and light, and fuel; these were the necessary things. If he could get them in sufficiency, they could endure another night.

He stepped into the garden, and as he did so he saw the living birds. The gulls had gone to ride the sea, as they had done before; they sought sea food, and the buoyancy of the tide, before they returned to the attack. Not so the land birds. They waited and watched. Nat saw them, on the hedgerows, on the soil, crowded in the trees, outside in the field, line upon line of birds, all still, doing nothing.

He went to the end of his small garden. The birds did not move. They went on watching him.

"I've got to get food," said Nat to himself. "I've got to go to the farm to find food."

He went back to the cottage. He saw to the windows and the doors. He went upstairs and opened the children's bedroom. It was empty, except for the dead birds on the floor. The living were out there, in the garden, in the fields. He went downstairs.

"I'm going to the farm," he said.

His wife clung to him. She had seen the living birds from the open door.

"Take us with you," she begged. "We can't stay here alone. I'd rather die than stay here alone." He considered the matter. He nodded.

"Come on, then," he said. "Bring baskets, and Johnny's pram. We can load up the pram."

They dressed against the biting wind, wore gloves and scarves. His wife put Johnny in the pram. Nat took Jill's hand.

"The birds," she whimpered, "they're all out there, in the fields."

"They won't hurt us," he said, "not in the light."

They started walking across the field towards the stile, and the birds did not move. They waited, their heads turned to the wind.

When they reached the turning to the farm, Nat stopped and told his wife to wait in the shelter of the hedge with the two children.

"But I want to see Mrs. Trigg," she protested. "There are lots of things we can borrow, if they went to market yesterday; not only bread, and . . ."

"Wait here," Nat interrupted. "I'll be back in a moment."

The cows were lowing, moving restlessly in the yard, and he could see a gap in the fence where the sheep had knocked their way through, to roam unchecked in the front garden before the farmhouse. No smoke came from the chimneys. He was filled with misgiving. He did not want his wife or the children to go down to the farm.

"Don't gib now," said Nat, harshly, "do what I say."

She withdrew with the pram into the hedge, screening herself and the children from the wind.

He went down alone to the farm. He pushed his way through the herd of bellowing cows, which turned this way and that, distressed, their udders full. He saw the car standing by the gate, not put away in the garage. The windows of the farmhouse were smashed. There were many dead gulls lying in the yard and around the house. The living birds perched on the group of trees behind the farm and on the roof of the house. They were quite still. They watched him.

Jim's body lay in the yard . . . what was left of it. When the birds had finished, the cows had trampled him. His gun was beside him. The door of the house was shut and bolted, but as the windows were smashed it was easy to lift them and climb through. Trigg's body was close to the telephone. He must have been trying to get through to the exchange when the birds came for him. The receiver was hanging loose, the instrument torn from the wall. No sign of Mrs. Trigg. She would be upstairs. Was it any use going up? Sick-

ened, Nat knew what he would find.

"Thank God," he said to himself, "there were no children."

He forced himself to climb the stairs, but halfway he turned and descended again. He could see her legs, protruding from the open bedroom door. Beside her were the bodies of the black-backed gulls, and an umbrella, broken.

"It's no use," thought Nat, "doing anything. I've only got five hours, less than that. The Triggs would understand. I must load up with what I can find."

He tramped back to his wife and children.

"I'm going to fill up the car with stuff," he said. "I'll put coal in it, and paraffin for the Primus. We'll take it home and return for a fresh load."

"What about the Triggs?" asked his wife.

"They must have gone to friends," he said.

"Shall I come and help you, then?"

"No; there's a mess down there. Cows and sheep all over the place. Wait, I'll get the car. You can sit in it."

Clumsily he backed the car out of the yard and into the lane. His wife and the children could not see Jim's body from there.

"Stay here," he said, "never mind the pram. The pram can be fetched later. I'm going to load the car."

Her eyes watched his all the time. He believed she understood, otherwise she would have suggested helping him to find the bread and groceries.

They made three journeys altogether, backwards and forwards between their cottage and the farm, before he was satisfied they had everything they needed. It was surprising, once he started thinking, how many things were necessary. Almost the most important of all was planking for the windows. He had to go round searching for timber. He wanted to renew the boards on all the windows at the cottage. Candles, paraffin, nails, tinned stuff; the list was endless. Besides all that, he milked three of the cows. The rest, poor brutes, would have to go on bellowing.

On the final journey he drove the car to the bus stop, got out, and went to the telephone box. He waited a few minutes, jangling the receiver. No good, though. The line was dead. He climbed onto a bank and looked over the countryside, but there was no sign of life at all, nothing in the fields but waiting, watching birds. Some of them slept—he could see the beaks tucked into the feathers.

"You'd think they'd be feeding," he said to himself, "not just

standing in that way."

Then he remembered, they were gorged with food. They had eaten their fill during the night. That was why they did not move this morning. . . .

No smoke came from the chimneys of the council houses. He thought of the children who had run across the fields the night before.

"I should have known," he thought. "I ought to have taken them home with me."

He lifted his face to the sky. It was colorless and grey. The bare trees on the landscape looked bent and blackened by the east wind. The cold did not affect the living birds, waiting out there in the fields.

"This is the time they ought to get them," said Nat, "they're a sitting target now. They must be doing this all over the country. Why don't our aircraft take off now and spray them with mustard gas? What are all our chaps doing? They must know, they must see for themselves."

He went back to the car and got into the driver's seat.

"Go quickly past that second gate," whispered his wife. "The postman's lying there. I don't want Jill to see."

He accelerated. The little Morris bumped and rattled along the lane. The children shrieked with laughter.

"Up-a-down, up-a-down," shouted young Johnny.

It was a quarter to one by the time they reached the cottage. Only an hour to go.

"Better have cold dinner," said Nat. "Hot up something for yourself and the children, some of that soup. I've no time to eat now. I've got to unload all this stuff."

He got everything inside the cottage. It could be sorted later. Give them all something to do during the long hours ahead. First he must see to the windows and the doors.

He went round the cottage methodically, testing every window, every door. He climbed onto the roof, also, and fixed boards across every chimney, except the kitchen. The cold was so intense he could hardly bear it, but the job had to be done. Now and again he would look up, searching the sky for aircraft. None came. As he worked he cursed the inefficiency of the authorities.

"It's always the same," he muttered, "they always let us down. Muddle, muddle, from the start. No plan, no real organization. And we don't matter, down here. That's what it is. The people up country

have priority. They're using gas up there, no doubt, and all the aircraft. We've got to wait and take what comes."

He paused, his work on the bedroom finished, and looked out to sea. Something was moving out there. Something grey and white among the breakers.

"Good old navy," he said, "they never let us down. They're coming down channel, they're turning in the bay."

He waited, straining his eyes, watering in the wind, towards the sea. He was wrong, though. It was not ships. The navy was not there. The gulls were rising from the sea. The massed flocks in the fields, with-ruffled feathers, rose in formation from the ground, and wing to wing soared upwards to the sky.

The tide had turned again.

Nat climbed down the ladder and went inside the kitchen. The family were at dinner. It was a little after two. He bolted the door, put up the barricade, and lit the lamp.

"It's nighttime," said young Johnny.

His wife had switched on the wireless once again, but no sound came from it.

"I've been all round the dial," she said, "foreign stations, and that lot. I can't get anything."

"Maybe they have the same trouble," he said. "Maybe it's the same right through Europe."

She poured out a plateful of the Triggs' soup, cut him a large slice of the Triggs' bread, and spread their dripping upon it.

They ate in silence. A piece of the dripping ran down young Johnny's chin and fell onto the table.

"Manners, Johnny," said Jill, "you should learn to wipe your mouth."

The tapping began at the windows, at the door. The rustling, the jostling, the pushing for position on the sills. The first thud of the suicide gulls upon the step.

"Won't America do something?" said his wife. "They've always been our allies, haven't they? Surely America will do something?"

Nat did not answer. The boards were strong against the windows, and on the chimneys, too. The cottage was filled with stores, with fuel, with all they needed for the next few days. When he had finished dinner he would put the stuff away, stack it neatly, get everything shipshape, handy-like. His wife could help him, and the children, too. They'd tire themselves out, between now and a quarter to nine, when the tide would ebb; then he'd tuck them

down on their mattresses, see that they slept good and sound until three in the morning.

He had a new scheme for the windows, which was to fix barbed wire in front of the boards. He had brought a great roll of it from the farm. The nuisance was, he'd have to work at this in the dark, when the lull came between nine and three. Pity he had not thought of it before. Still, as long as the wife slept, and the kids, that was the main thing.

The smaller birds were at the window now. He recognized the light tap-tapping of their beaks, and the soft brush of their wings. The hawks ignored the windows. They concentrated their attack upon the door. Nat listened to the tearing sound of splintering wood, and wondered how many million years of memory were stored in those little brains, behind the stabbing beaks, the piercing eyes, now giving them this instinct to destroy mankind with all the deft precision of machines.

"I'll smoke that last fag," he said to his wife. "Stupid of me, it was the one-thing I forgot to bring back from the farm."

He reached for it, switched on the silent wireless. He threw the empty packet on the fire, and watched it burn.

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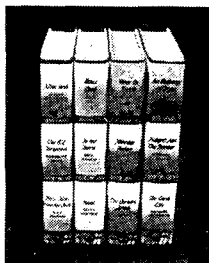
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